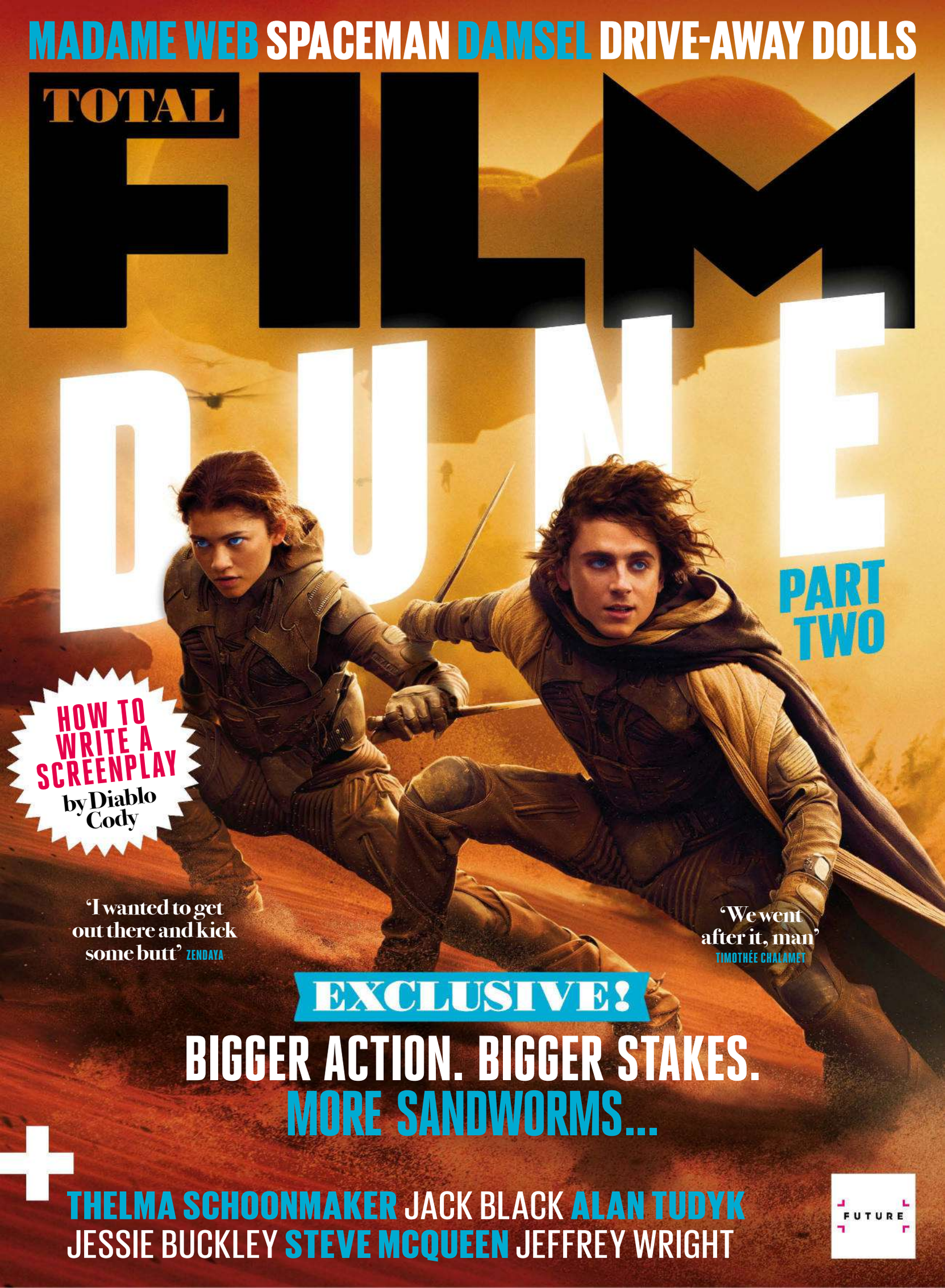
MADAME WEB SPACEMAN DAMSEL DRIVE-AWAY DOLLS

TOTAL FILM



DUNE PART TWO

HOW TO WRITE A SCREENPLAY by Diablo Cody

'I wanted to get out there and kick some butt' ZENDAYA

'We went after it, man' TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET

EXCLUSIVE!

BIGGER ACTION. BIGGER STAKES. MORE SANDWORMS...

+

THELMA SCHOONMAKER JACK BLACK ALAN TUDYK
JESSIE BUCKLEY STEVE MCQUEEN JEFFREY WRIGHT

FUTURE

STILL WAKES THE DEEP
COMING 2024
WISHLIST NOW
PC GAMER
MOST WANTED
2023
STEAM
PS5
GAME PASS
XBOX SERIES X|S
The Chinese Room
SECRET MODE

Welcome to

TOTAL FILM

THE SMARTER MOVIE MAGAZINE

It's apt that our cover film should close a chapter, seeing as I am shutting the book on *Total Film* with this issue (my 153rd). After 10 years of captaining this fine ship, I'll be stepping off the deck to hand the captain's hat over to the most excellent Matt Maytum, with Jordan Farley as his chief mate. It's been a glorious ride; *Total Film* has remained engaged, authentic, smart and fun in the years I've been aboard – both in team and output. There have been so many magnificent people, places and things that I could write a letter the length of this magazine, but if you know me at all you know I favour a brisk run time. So in the spirit of awards season, here are my gongs for my time at *TF* Towers:

Best on-set moment: Being on any Bond set is pure pinch-me, but the best (and hottest) was being the only journalist on the *Skyfall* set who watched the titular lodge burn to the ground. (Special mention to the Pinewood Bond archives, where I donned white gloves to handle THE golden gun, Jaws' silver teeth and Connery's annotated script.)

Best interview: So many, but silverware for Michelle Rodriguez who saved me from a falling palm tree during our chat in Cancun; Christopher Nolan for inviting me into his editing sanctuary to talk *Dunkirk* and drink Earl Grey; Kevin Costner for full star power; Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter for making kid dreams come true…

Best party: The *Elvis* party at The Formosa before the Golden Globes. Baz Luhrmann MC-ing, Lisa Marie and Priscilla Presley hanging out at the bar. My seven-year-old Elvis fan self just died.

Best festival: Venice. When you're bobbing across the lagoon in a water taxi to chat to Timmy Chalamet at the Cipriani, life doesn't get much better.

Best mentor: Jamie Graham. Such film knowledge, such mag craft. Such terrible luck with eggs and gyms.

Best cake: We get a lot of them but there's none more impressive, delicious or Hollywood than the Tom Cruise coconut/white choc Christmas cake each December. Truly makes the season and my year.

Best work spouses: Matt, Jordan, Matthew, Mike (formerly of this parish). This team is the BEST. I can't wait to see what they do with all the future issues incoming. I will now become a very excited subscriber and contributor to mag and podcast.

So now you know. And with that I'll depart. Here's looking at you, kids…

Jane

JANE CROWTHER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
@JANEVGCROWTHER

CALL SHEET
THIS ISSUE'S EXTRAS

NEWS EDITOR (DEPUTY EDITOR FROM NEXT ISSUE)
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

I had a blast speaking to the cast of *Dune: Part Two* for this issue's cover feature, particularly Josh Brolin who tossed away his sheet of studio-supplied 'talking points', saying 'I try not to read those.'

DEPUTY EDITOR (EDITOR FROM NEXT ISSUE)
MATT MAYTUM
@MATTMAYTUM

Enjoyed chatting screenwriting tips with Diablo Cody, who was 'in a closet, on a beanbag chair, surrounded by trash'. Hard relate on the joys of working at home when you have kids.

EDITOR-AT-LARGE
JAMIE GRAHAM
@JAMIE_GRAHAM9

Lovely to catch up with Jessie Buckley again. I once told her how I watch horror movies with the back door open to increase fear. Told me she's told everyone about it.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
NEIL SMITH
@TOTALFILM

I spent a happy three hours reliving my childhood at the Disney 100 exhibition at ExCel London. Costumes, props and 80-year-old maquettes – *Walt's* not to love?

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
LEILA LATIF
@LEILA_LATIF

Johan Renck said if I make it to its Berlin premiere I can share my thoughts on *Spaceman* over pints in a back room with him, Adam Sandler, Carey Mulligan and Paul Dano.

ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
EMILY MURRAY
@EMILYVMURRAY

Joel Edgerton was telling me about the fox that lives in his backyard whilst talking *The Boys in the Boat*... apparently it has made itself quite at home there.

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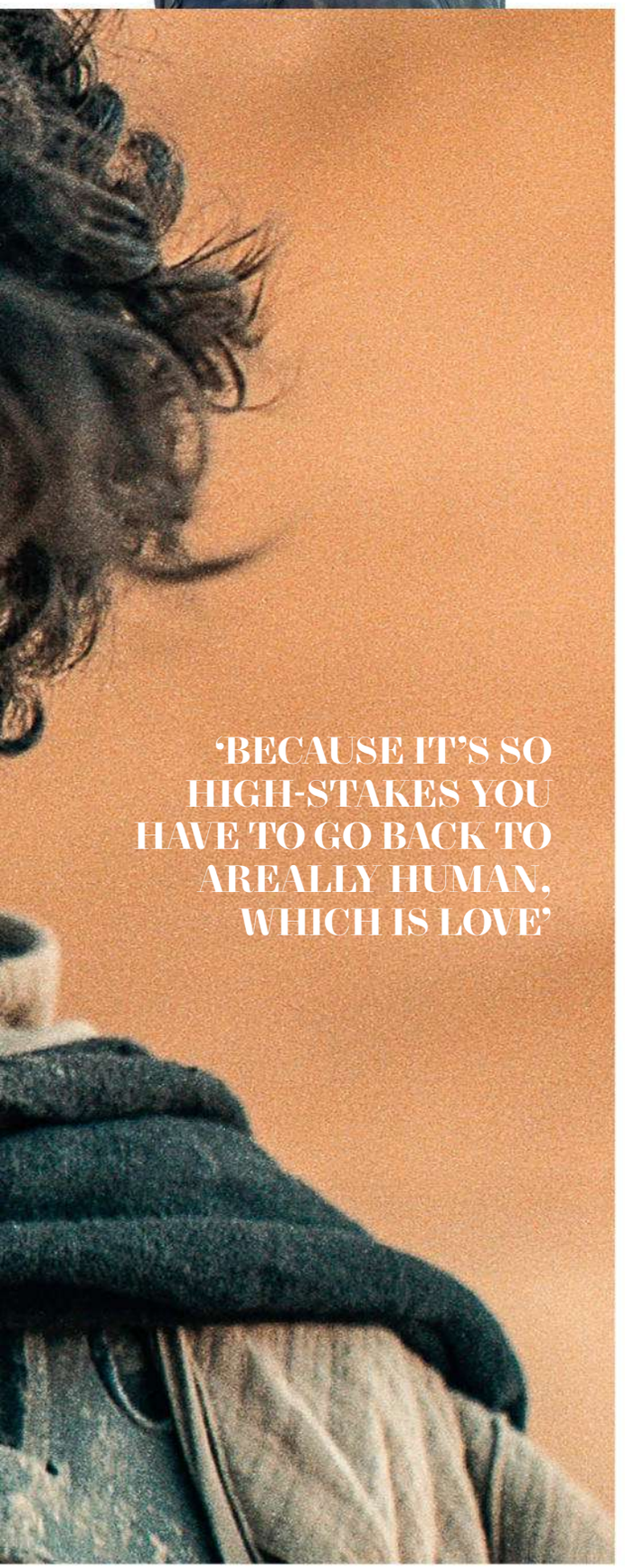

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EDITED BY
JORDAN FARLEY
@JORDANFARLEY

EXCLUSIVE

TEASERS

HERE BE DRAGONS

DAMSEL Millie Bobby Brown fights fire with fire in the bedtime story that's finally being told the right way.

Once upon a time, in a land far away, a beautiful princess was captured by a terrible dragon. Many tried to fight the beast, but it was only the handsome prince who was strong enough to slay the dragon and rescue his new bride. And they all lived happily ever after.

'I think we're owed a new fairy tale…' laughs director Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, chatting to *Total Film* as he puts the last few touches on *Damsel* – a film that puts a new spin on the same story we've been hearing since the Dark Ages. 'For a very long time, fairy tales attached so much importance to the idea of romance. This isn't that story,' he explains. 'This is a fighter survivor story. A modern story. A dark fantasy adventure story that actually needs to be told – and with some urgency'.

To begin with, *Damsel*'s princess isn't captured by the dragon at all: she's thrown into its lair as a human sacrifice (and it's the handsome prince that chucks her in…). More importantly though, she's the one who has to save herself. Millie Bobby Brown is Princess Elodie: betrayed by her own father (Ray Winstone), stepmother (Angela Bassett), queen (Robin Wright) and new husband (Nick Robinson) before being lobbed into a pit to face a terrifying monster.

'I've always been attracted to these kind of folklore stories,' says Fresnadillo, directing his first feature since 2011's *Intruders* and 2007's *28 Weeks Later*. 'We always have a main character who is suffering

some sort of transformation, or learning something that implies a coming of age, and I was obsessed with that ever since I was a young adult. With *Damsel*, I had the chance to adapt those ideas into a more modern tale, into something much more important.'

Needing a princess who could shoulder the whole film on her own, mostly in the dark, Fresnadillo turned to Brown as his first choice. 'She was exceptional,' he says, speaking to the way she approached the film's brutality, as well as the emotional demands of the tough shoot. 'She understood that this needed to be an extreme survival experience. And in order to make that believable, you have to convey suffering and pain. This is a movie about a transformation – about a girl becoming a woman – and you need to really feel the intensity of it. We didn't want to cheat any of that, and that's why we pushed all the limits to make this a huge roller coaster of an experience for the audience.'

For the cast and crew, that meant real locations, real fire and real water before the Portugal-based shoot moved into an elaborate labyrinth of cave sets that presented even more of a challenge.

'The caves were a huge problem in terms of light, and in terms of design, because you're dealing with an environment that's really tight and dark,' says Fresnadillo – mentioning *Alice In Wonderland* as a thematic inspiration, and shrugging off one horrifying scene he chose to light entirely with a flock of flaming sparrows.

'It's not always easy to shoot that kind of stuff,' he says, 'but it's a much bigger challenge for Millie to go through almost half of the movie in such a difficult environment. You're dealing with rocks, hard surfaces, cramped ceilings, fire, water, darkness… If you want to be realistic, which was the goal, you have to really believe it. And that kind of realism implies toughness. And it was absolutely tough for Millie.'

And then there's the dragon. Keen not to reveal too much about the film's biggest, scaliest star, Fresnadillo wants *Damsel*'s dragon to stay in the shadows for now – even though he does want to stress that it's the best and most original version of the creature we've ever seen. 'We did a lot of literary research to find the right look, but I think our dragon is unique in so many ways,' he says. 'The most important thing when you're designing a monster is to bring through the values of the character. There's a backstory that affects the dragon's behaviour and movement, but that also starts with the design. This is a creature that lives in a very specific place. It has to have a sleek, agile figure in order to survive. We wanted something that moved in a very feline way, like a lion. The thinking behind that concept inspired a lot of the film, actually.'

Shooting during the pandemic, staging a huge aerial action scenes with a river of molten lava, and having to convince Ray Winstone to hang upside-down in full medieval battle armour, Fresnadillo had his work cut out on *Damsel* – but the biggest challenge for him was telling a tale that everyone thinks they already know in a way that felt like it meant something.

'It's a special privilege to tell these kinds of stories with an original and unique take, because it lets you create a beautiful bridge to new generations,' he says. 'We wanted to make a really exciting, scary, adventurous dark fantasy film that felt meaningful about the position of women in society and in culture in general. If you want to push the limits of the genre, you have to go in different directions and explore places and ideas that have never been explored before. And that's always going to be a big challenge. But I think it's time to tell this story properly.'

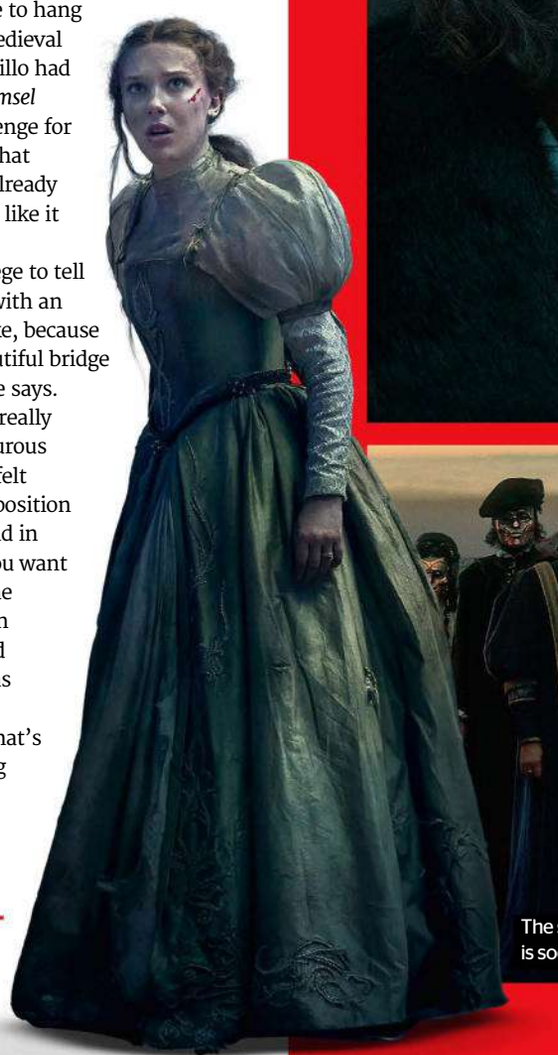
PAUL BRADSHAW

'This is a movie about a transformation – about a girl becoming a woman – and you need to really feel the intensity of it'
JUAN CARLOS FRESNADILLO

DAMSEL STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 8 MARCH.

Robin Wright plays Queen Isabelle

The sacrificial ceremony is soon to begin...



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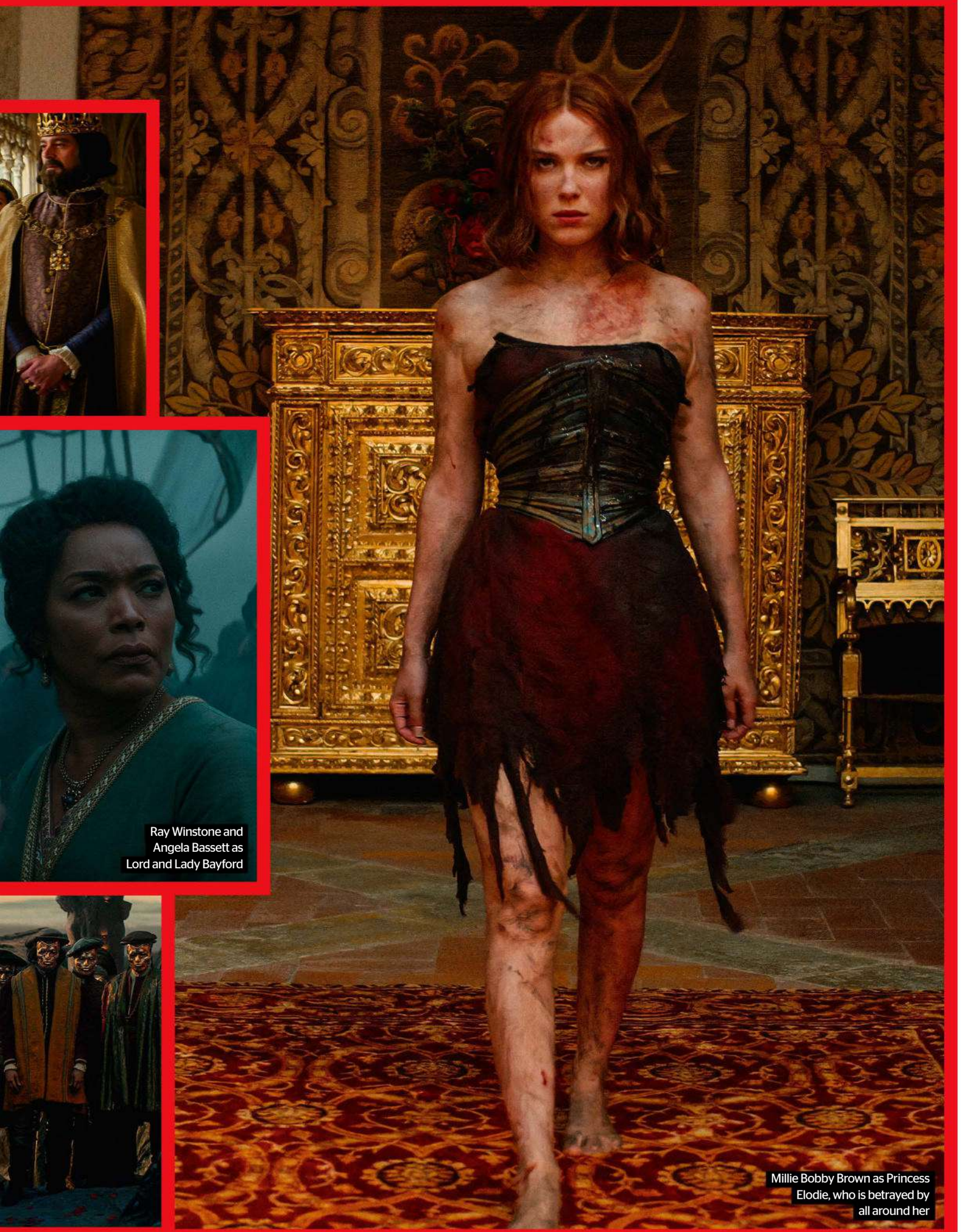
Ray Winstone and Angela Bassett as Lord and Lady Bayford



Millie Bobby Brown as Princess Elodie, who is betrayed by all around her

NETFLIX

HOT RIGHT NOW

KE HUY QUAN
NEVER SAYS DIE...

As Ke Huy Quan recalls, he was anxious shooting his first scene for *Everything Everywhere All at Once* after roughly 20 years away from acting. But a two-decade wait had helped make him perseverant – so, he persevered. And the way Quan tells it, Jamie Lee Curtis hugged him afterwards and said, 'Ke, that was fucking amazing.'

Soon, everyone wanted to give Quan a hug (and an Oscar) for how amazing he was in 2022's bagel-based brain-melter. Flexing multiple skill sets as variants of one man, he hit the marks of upbeat father, fanny-pack fighter and moody romantic with charm, verve and natural ease. And now, with upcoming movies from the Russo brothers and action studio 87North on his plate, he's positioned to amaze again.

Audiences first warmed to Quan in the early 80s, after he migrated with family from Vietnam and caught Spielberg's attention. He brought brimming energy to Short Round in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and Data in *The Goonies*, only to struggle afterwards. He trained hard but after appearances in TV shows (*Together We Stand*, *Head of the Class*) and forgotten films (*California Man*, *Breathing Fire*), work was not forthcoming for a young Asian actor.

Though 'dispirited', Quan kept movies close. He studied film at university and bided his time, working as an assistant fight choreographer with Corey Yuen and an assistant director to famously slow-moving auteur Wong Kar-wai. Action know-how and patience thus nurtured, it was when Quan saw *Crazy Rich Asians* in 2018 that he developed 'serious FOMO' and plunged back into acting.

After adventure-fantasy *Finding 'Ohana* and *Everything...*, Quan banked a savvy meta cameo in Disney+'s *American Born Chinese* and breezily stole scenes as *Loki*'s TVA tech, Ouroboros. In 2024, we'll see him united with fellow MCU alumni (the Russos and Chris Pratt, plus Millie Bobby Brown) for sci-fi adventure *The Electric State* and hear him in *Kung Fu Panda 4*. And he'll lead *With Love* for John Wick studio 87North, a fitting destination for an actor who's as beloved as Keanu Reeves. 'I'm in such a good place,' Quan has said. Not before time, his perseverance is clearly working wonders. **KEVIN HARLEY**

KUNG FU PANDA 4 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 MARCH. WITH LOVE AND THE ELECTRIC STATE ARE BOTH TBC.

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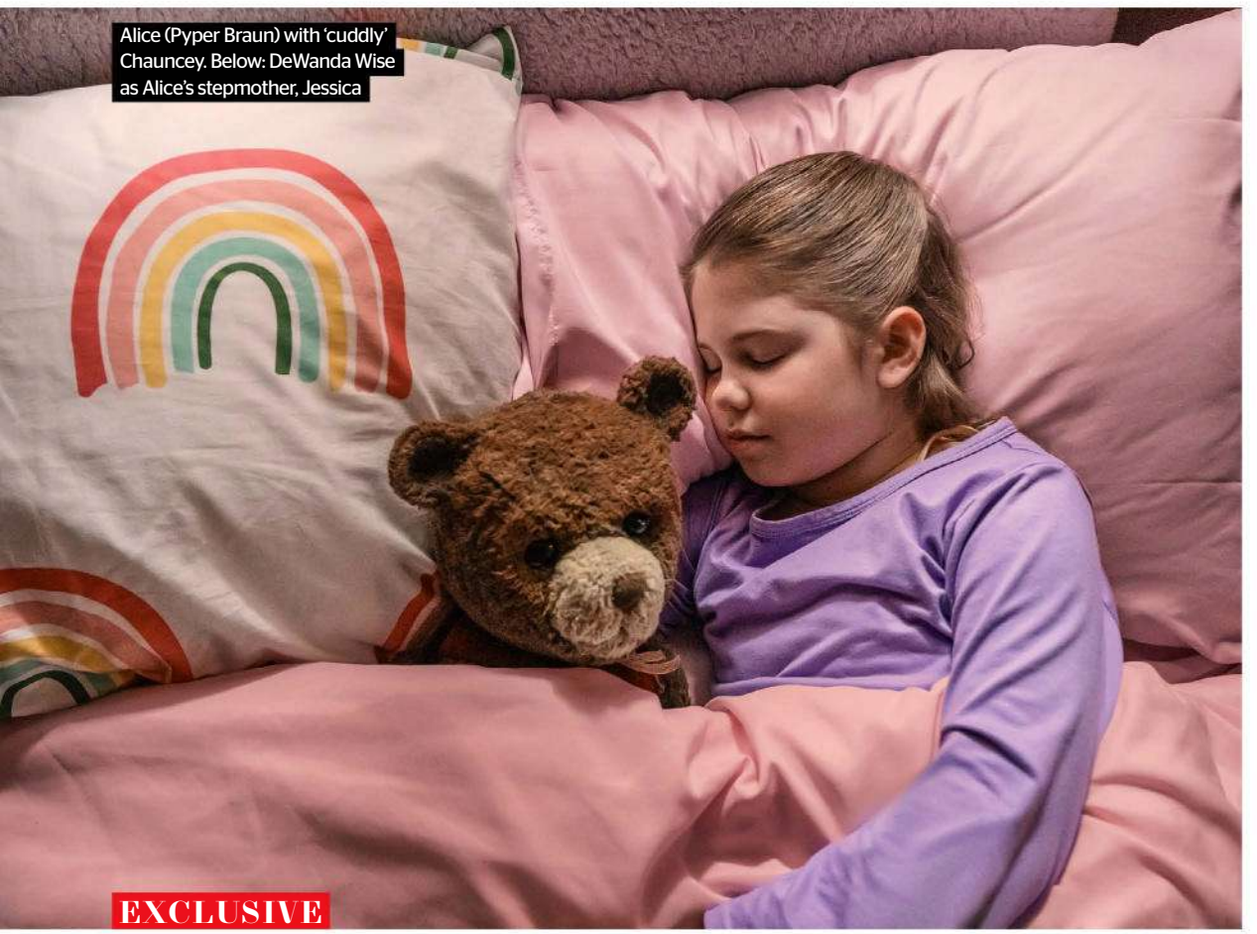


Alice (Pyper Braun) with 'cuddly' Chauncey. Below: DeWanda Wise as Alice's stepmother, Jessica

EXCLUSIVE

FRIENDS TO THE END

IMAGINARY A spurned childhood friend is out for revenge in Blumhouse's killer-teddy-bear movie.

The killer-doll subgenre is one of grand horror tradition, extending back to 1945's *Dead of Night*, and taking in subsequent icons Chucky, Annabelle and M3gan. The killer teddy bear, however, has yet to break out of the toybox in the same way.

Enter Chauncey – the cuddly monster of Blumhouse's *Imaginary*. The childhood chum of Jessica (DeWanda Wise, also executive producer), Chauncey isn't too happy at being abandoned when she leaves her family home. And he's still there when she returns, years later, with her own family, including stepdaughter Alice (Pyper Braun), who he quickly latches onto.

This is director Jeff Wadlow's third Blumhouse collaboration. Where previous films *Truth or Dare* and *Fantasy Island* broke the mold somewhat, *Imaginary* finds the studio in more familiar territory. 'This is my attempt at making the most classically Blumhouse movie – in that it is about a family in a home,' he tells *Teasers*.

Naturally, it's Chauncey who dominates conversation, in all his forms – including the one hiding behind the stuffed bear. 'It really is a whole menagerie of imagination that we have created,' Wadlow teases, hinting at the entity concealed inside the unassuming teddy bear.

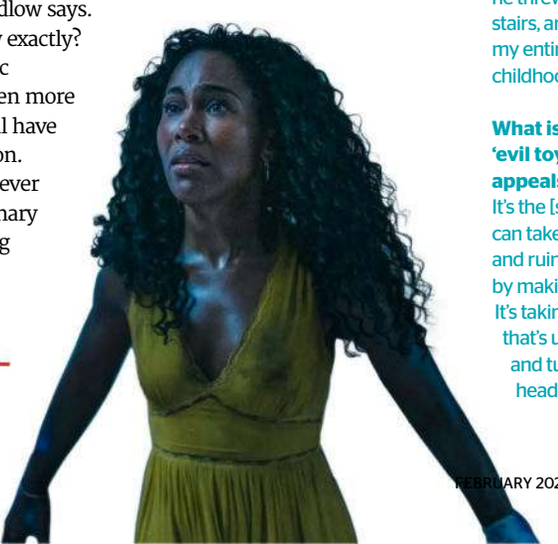
However, it was no easy task finding a balance between cutesy and creepy. 'You have to believe that this kid wants to hang out with Chauncey,' Wadlow says. 'No kid would want to have a tea party with Annabelle. But we had some designs that were too cute… that looked too much like Paddington.'

What Chauncey does bear in common with his peers is that sense of fun behind the scares. 'We definitely touch on some dark themes, but also never lose sight of the fact that it's a movie about imaginary friends and a stuffed teddy bear!' Wadlow says.

And what is Chauncey exactly? Killer teddy bear, demonic entity… or something even more malignant? For now, we'll have to use our, uh, imagination. Grins Wadlow: 'If you've ever wondered what an imaginary friend is, or how terrifying it might be, you're going to have a good time.'

JOEL HARLEY

IMAGINARY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 8 MARCH.



GETTY, LIONSGATE

Q&A

DeWanda Wise

How did playing Jessica differ from your experience in *Jurassic World Dominion*?

I met with Jeff and he said, 'My only concern is that you can come across as really capable. And Jessica is not, necessarily. She's not Kayla.' I told him, 'Oh, Jeff, I'm tired! I don't need to be the hero. I want to be dainty and saved!'

***Imaginary* is your horror debut. What made this project stand out?**

Mostly the psychological element – this notion that the most terrifying things are those things in our life we don't face. If you don't deal with it, it might deal with you. Chauncey is a stand-in for those things we refuse to confront.

Did you have any childhood experiences that you drew on in your performance?

I grew up in the 90s, so I had a Teddy Ruxpin bear. My older brother, at one point, to terrorise me, he threw Teddy down the stairs, and I almost lost my entire mind. It's a core childhood memory.

What is it about the 'evil toy' subgenre that appeals to audiences?

It's the [same] reason you can take a classic song and ruin it for everybody by making it terrifying. It's taking something that's universally iconic and turning it on its head. **JOEL HARLEY**

YOU TALKIN' TO ME?

FILM QUOTES POSE AS QUESTIONS. FILM STARS TRY TO COPE.

You talkin' to me?
Yes, I am talking to you. I'm talking *at* you. I'm talking *with* you.

You've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?'
Well, do ya, punk?
I am lucky [pause]. I should be dead. Not because I've battled a disease or anything that requires courage. But because I was a rowdy kid from Texas with imaginative friends, and we came up with the craziest stuff to do. When I think back on it, I absolutely 100% should be dead. Instead, I'm 52.

Do you have an 'off' switch?
Yes. I have an 'off' switch that works really well. My 'on' switch, however, there's a short in it. You have to toggle the thing really well. But man, I can 'off' for any amount of time. It's my preferred state.

Aren't you a little short for a Stormtrooper?
Not only am I short for a Stormtrooper, I'm short for a KX unit in the *Rogue One* universe, and I require a pair of stilts fashioned by ILM with actual prosthetic legs. So prosthetic legs and ski boots, together. And that brings me to the proper 7ft 1in height that you need to be to be a KX unit.

How can you talk if you haven't got a brain?
You just get campaign backers with special interests to support you, and they provide you with a script that's pre-written. If you can't read, for lack of brain, they'll just pipe it into an earpiece. You don't even have to get all the words right.

You talk the talk but can you walk the walk?
Yes, I do, although if my talking puts me in a position that I'm not comfortable walking in, I change my talk pretty fast. I will apologise. I will admit a mistake. I will abridge my speech, and edit it down to where I'm comfortable walking.

Can you fly this plane and land it?
It depends on your definition of 'land'. It will be on the ground, absolutely. I, in my acting career, flew in *Serenity*. I flew some Star Wars ship, then a second Star Wars ship. And I flew one recently for *Resident Alien*. I've flown at least four spaceships, and crashed three. So I will land it. How many pieces? That I can't say until the counting is done.

IN THE CROSSHAIRS THIS MONTH... ALAN TUDYK

Why don't you tell me the story of your life?
I won't tell it because there are far more interesting stories. I'm a f***ing actor! It's so boring. The stories I tell are more interesting than my own.

You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?
I flew from Australia once, and went to go see *Macbeth* with Patrick Stewart the night I got back to New York City. I fell asleep and woke up in the middle of Act One, with Patrick Stewart standing centre stage, looking down on me, reciting his lines, staring straight at me. I made it to the intermission and left! I was just so ashamed.

Tudyk stars as Tom in dark comedy *The Trouble with Jessica*, alongside Indira Varma, Olivia Williams, Shirley Henderson and Rufus Sewell

Have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight?
My wife… she may have been the devil at one time [laughs]. You know those friends where you become a devil for one another? 'What if we did this?' We'd break into things, steal things – minor things. Nobody got hurt. Nobody lost anything. We stole a boat in Central Park at two in the morning and rode around the park in the pale moonlight – until we saw a cop, and then we ran like hell.

I say to you: 'Don't think about elephants.' What do you think about?
Honestly, elephants, but just their feet. I think about the safari I went on in Ruaha, Tanzania, a month ago. We were doing a walking safari where you're not in a truck. You're just walking around, and you've got a guy with a gun. If the elephants hear or smell you, you're in trouble.

You've waited your whole life for Sir Ector to shite himself to death?
That was *First Knight*! The year 2000, the Czech Republic. Five months, two weeks and two days with that crazy crew of people. We'd go out to bars at night, and if there was trouble, we'd all stand as one. And Heath Ledger was just brilliant. I think he turned 21 when we did that movie. He helped me out a lot over that summer. My closest friend died at the time and [Heath] moved me into his house and took care of me. He was 10 years my junior and was like, 'I've got you, buddy.' I was nursed to health by him and Heather Graham. If it wasn't for them, I, too, would have shite myself to death. **JORDAN FARLEY**

THE TROUBLE WITH JESSICA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 15 MARCH.

PARKLAND ENTERTAINMENT

QUESTIONS TAKEN FROM: TAXI DRIVER, DIRTY HARRY, DEADPOOL, STAR WARS: EPISODE IV - A NEW HOPE, THE WIZARD OF OZ, FULL METAL JACKET, AIRPLANE!, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY, THE MATRIX, BATMAN, INCEPTION, A KNIGHT'S TALE

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Hiroyuki Sanada as Lord Yoshii Toranaga, who faces civil war and power struggles in Japan, 1600

EXCLUSIVE

TOTAL WAR

SHŌGUN The blockbuster historical saga gets an ambitious 2024 update.

As if it isn't hard enough making a 10-hour epic with sieges, swordfights and shipwrecks, the makers of *Shōgun* also had to deal with bears trying to eat their sandwiches. 'One day a black bear got into the craft service line,' laughs writer/creator Justin Marks. 'We had a 3,000-strong cast and crew. We were at war with the elements. But every day it was "Bear, bear, bear!" over the radio.'

Rebuilding an entire feudal Japanese fishing village on a remote coast of Vancouver, Marks – alongside co-writer and creator (and wife), Rachel Kondo – took on one of the most ambitious adaptations in historical fiction bringing James Clavell's 1975 hefty bestseller to the screen.

'I think we're both of the generation where *Shōgun* was a book on everyone's parents' nightstand,' says Marks. 'We all understood what it stands for. But I knew there were aspects that needed updating. It became the cardinal sin that we didn't want to commit: to tell a story that we've already seen before.'

Framed around the (real) battle of Sekigahara in 1600, and the rise of the *daimyō* Toranaga, the sprawling saga was last filmed in 1980 as a miniseries starring Richard Chamberlain and Toshiro Mifune. But for Marks and Kondo, the big mistake made back then was in showing everything through the eyes of Chamberlain's shipwrecked English sailor, John Blackthorne (now played by Cosmo Jarvis).

'This was an opportunity for me to connect with my Japanese heritage,' says Kondo. 'You're in the hands of a master storyteller with James Clavell, but we wanted to take the Blackthorne character and diffuse him into the ensemble; to give him the same weight we gave Toranaga [Hiroyuki Sanada] and Mariko [Anna Sawai].'

'It had to feel authentic, but it had to feel original'
JUSTIN MARKS

Cosmo Jarvis stars as shipwrecked sailor John Blackthorne

'You have to let the wind make the show,' adds Marks, speaking of giving way to the real elements that battered the set, as well as the way the series evolved with its cast and crew. 'It had to feel authentic, but it had to feel original. To create a style that was imitative of any traditional *jidaigeki* Samurai story would feel like we were donning a costume that didn't belong to us. We didn't want this to feel like the lobby of a Japanese restaurant.'

But with authenticity comes the challenge – bringing Marks back to the expansive battle scenes (and bears) that made the nine-month shoot so gruelling. 'I remember the night we were shooting in the woods with horses, snow, arrows and fire, and just walking through the set and feeling like I was in the bridge scene of *Apocalypse Now*,' he laughs. 'It was punishing. But it was what we needed to do to transport the audience. It was the only way to tell this story.' **PAUL BRADSHAW**

SHŌGUN STREAMS ON DISNEY+ FROM 27 FEBRUARY.

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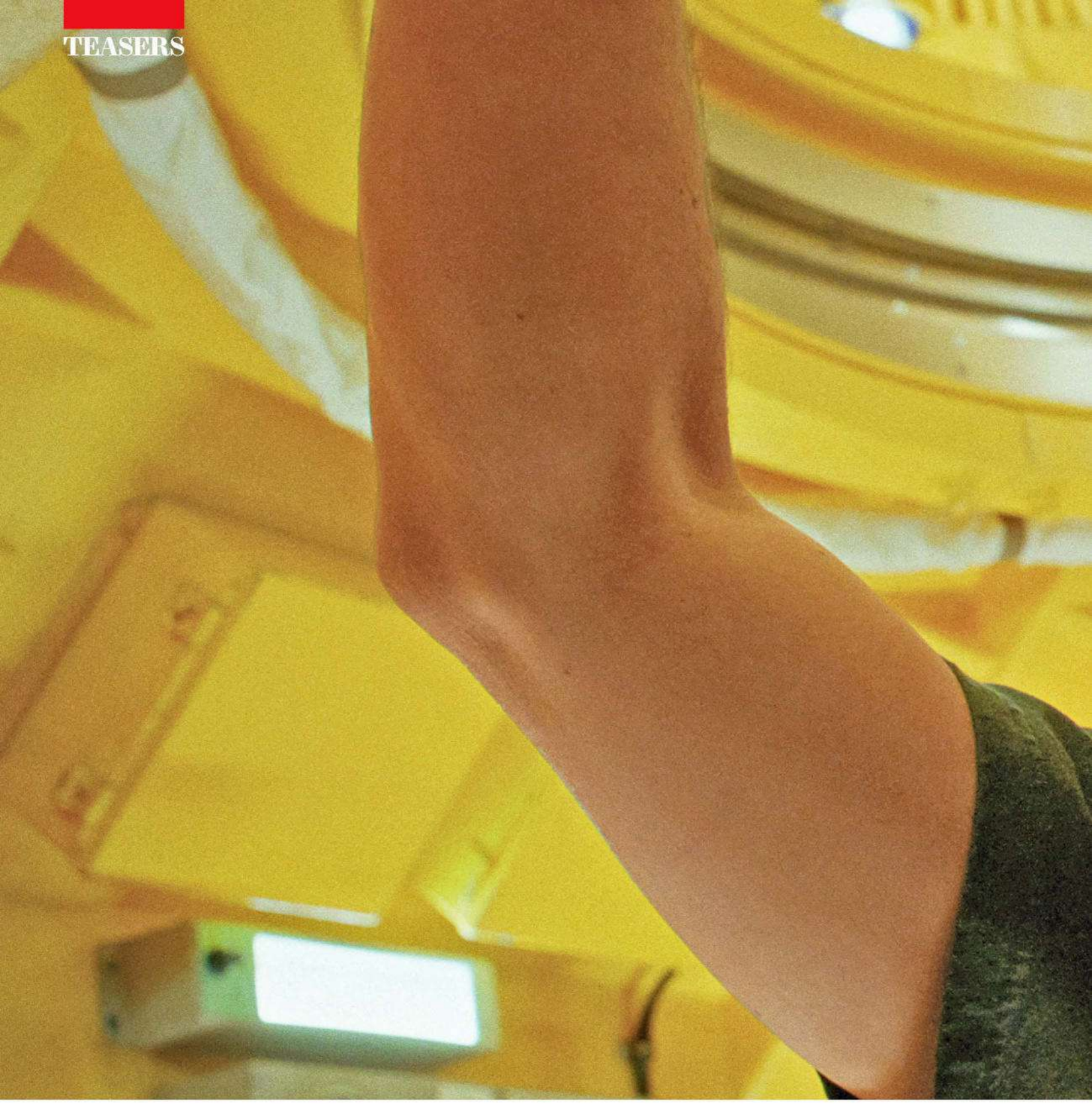

EXCLUSIVE

SPACE ODDITY

SPACEMAN Adam Sandler is a man on a mission, embarking on a weird and wonderful off-planet odyssey.

Few prospects are as exciting as a new dramatic turn from Adam Sandler, but *Spaceman* director Johan Renck is even more besotted by the star than most, telling *Teasers*, 'I love him as an actor, and I've grown to have a very deep, profound love for him as a human being.'

But despite his admiration, his goal was to 'make a character that is zero Adam Sandler. Even in *Punch-Drunk Love* or *Uncut Gems*, there's always an aspect of Adam, which is great, but I really wanted to diminish that. I told Adam, "I want to turn you into me."'

Hot off the success of the TV series *Chernobyl*, Renck 'received one billion scripts about industrial accidents', but he explains that 'whenever I'm done with something, I've consumed all my interest in anything that's even remotely close to it. This was completely different and became tremendously self-biographical.'

Adapted from Jaroslav Kalfař's 2017 novel *Spaceman of Bohemia*, the film sees Sandler play Jakub, an astronaut who leaves his pregnant wife Lenka (Carey Mulligan) to investigate a mysterious purple cloud by Jupiter, only to encounter an alien spider (voiced by Paul Dano), who Renck describes as 'frightening, revolting,

NETFLIX

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Adam Sandler stars as Jakub, an astronaut journeying to a mysterious cloud off Jupiter

cute, pathetic and loveable, with luscious lips and weird kid teeth.' While this encounter might not seem like the most autobiographical tale for the Swedish musician-turned-director, he claims 'everything is personal, and we are all sort of programmed to have this solipsistic view on getting to our purple clouds.'

The purple 'Chopra' cloud is more than a means to get Sandler and a space spider chatting, according to Renck. 'At the surface level, it represents hard-won goals and the human urge to discover,' the director says. 'But then it's kind of the opposite, and contains every vibration of past, present, future and how you can look for forgiveness but your choices are forever part of the canon of our universe.'

Renck describes the core concept as 'spiritually very Zen' but also 'scientifically based in string theory', and every aspect of the production design speaks to a 'parallel time that is not a representation of our past or present, with just a whiff of Soviet form and function'. But ultimately, the director was 'not interested in making people think stuff. I just want them to feel the same way I feel. We choose this weird job because we feel perpetually misunderstood.'

'We are all sort of programmed to have this solipsistic view on getting to our purple clouds'
JOHAN RENCK

After it premieres at the Berlin Film Festival later this month, *Spaceman* will head to Netflix. Renck laughs: 'I'm sure people are gonna get pissed off if they click on Adam's face hoping for [a] Happy Madison [-style movie]!' But just as Jakub finds deep profundity from a human-mouthed extraterrestrial spider, those open to the unexpected will find Sandler giving one of his finest performances in an elegant fable about inner and outer space. **LEILA LATIF**

SPACEMAN STREAMS ON NETFLIX FROM 1 MARCH.

TRAILER BREAKDOWN

YOUNG BLOOD

ABIGAIL Radio Silence return with a new spin on a classic screen monster.

01

After a successful foray into the Scream franchise, directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett are returning to their *Ready or Not* roots with horror comedy *Abigail*, about a group of criminals hired to keep the 12-year-old ballerina daughter of a crime boss captive for 24 hours.

02

The catch – because there's always a catch – is that the innocent-looking child (played by *Matilda*'s Alisha Weir) is actually a vampire. And not just any vampire, with the film reportedly a reimagining of 1936's *Dracula's Daughter*. She's not locked in with them, they're locked in with her…

03

Melissa Barrera stars as Joey who, despite having a child of her own and taking the time to comfort a pre-transformation Abigail, is in as much danger as everyone else in the house. 'I'm sorry about what's going to happen to you,' says a seemingly sincere Abigail.

04

'What are we talking about, like an Anne Rice, or *True Blood*, you know, *Twilight*?' asks Kathryn Newton's crim. Evidently Radio Silence aren't jettisoning the meta-smarts of the *Scream* series. Time will tell if the old reliables – wooden stakes, garlic, daylight – have any effect.

05

'What can I say? I like playing with my food,' teases Abigail, who pirouettes and pliés around the house while stalking her prey. Not only that: she can fly. The pit of bloated corpses in the basement make it clear this isn't the first massacre.

06

Expect a pitch-black streak of humour to run through *Abigail*, with the character shaking off a bullet to the head and doing the waltz with a headless corpse. 'I fucking hate ballet,' says Dan Stevens' bad guy. Can you blame him? **JORDAN FARLEY**

UNIVERSAL

ABIGAIL OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 19 APRIL.

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Minato and classmate Yori (Hinata Hiiragi) develop a close friendship

EXCLUSIVE

BACK TO SCHOOL

MONSTER Hirokazu Kore-eda's latest takes us into a child's viewpoint once again...

Japanese maestro Hirokazu Kore-eda is an expert at portraying childhood, whether it's the siblings who fend for themselves in *Nobody Knows* or the young girl taken in from the streets by a makeshift family in *Shoplifters*. His latest film, *Monster*, takes place in a small school in rural Japan, offering shifting perspectives on a story that keeps its secrets hidden until the final act.

Soya Kurokawa as Minato, with Sakura Ando as his mother, Saori

The focus is the young pupil Minato (Soya Kurokawa), whose single mother Saori (Sakura Ando) is soon storming off down to the school under the impression that her son's teacher, Mr. Hori (Eita Nagayama), has hit her boy. But that's just the start of an increasingly complex tale – it won Best Screenplay for writer Yûji Sakamoto in Cannes last year – that replays events through various eyes, *Rashomon*-style.

For Kore-eda, 61, it was the chance to use a school setting to explore adult themes. '[At one point] the teacher tells the boys to be like men, and these [are] adult values kind of compressed into children's society. And so this twisted view of the world that adults might have gets reflected on the children and that's what happens in our society as well – in Japanese society – and that's where the cracks start to appear, and the school is just representative of that.'

Once again, Kore-eda shows what a master he is at directing children – notably Kurokawa and Hinata Hiiragi, who plays Minato's bullied classmate, Yori. 'There is no one method that works for all children,' he explains. 'It's like teaching... you have to find the way of teaching that suits that individual child. Same with directing. And what I do is I spend time with those children that I've cast and spend time thinking about the role. There really is no substitute for time.'

Performances aside, one of the most distinguishing elements of *Monster* is the music, marking the final score by the legendary Oscar-winning composer Ryuichi Sakamoto (*The Last Emperor*), who died in March 2023. 'He was the only person I had in mind for the soundtrack. And, of course, he wasn't well and so I thought it might be difficult.' Still, Sakamoto agreed. 'I was really proud that I got to work with him right at the very end.'

'This boy begins to see a monster in himself... he has emotions he doesn't understand'
HIROKAZU KORE-EDA

The question is, why is the film called *Monster*? Kore-eda points that film is about 'seeking the monster' inside oneself, which becomes apparent when Minato develops feelings for Yori. 'The fact that this boy begins to see a monster in himself is because he has emotions that he doesn't understand. And he can't give voice to. And that emotion is that he loves someone, which is a normal emotion. It just so happens that someone that he loves is another boy.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

MONSTER OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 15 MARCH.

PICTUREHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

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‘I THINK I DID SOME OF THE BEST WORK I WILL EVER DO, BUT IT WENT A LITTLE BIT UNNOTICED BECAUSE OF THE GENRE.’

ROBERT DOWNEY JR. RATES HIS WORK IN THE MCU.

‘They’re really annoying, especially in the workplace. They’re like, “Nah, I’m not feeling it today, I’m gonna come in at 10.30am.”’

JODIE FOSTER DOES NOT LIKE WORKING WITH GEN-Z ACTORS.

SOUND BYTES

The month in dialogue and digits.

10,227

THE NUMBER OF IN-UNIVERSE DAYS BETWEEN *28 DAYS LATER* AND **28 YEARS LATER**, WHICH DANNY BOYLE AND ALEX GARLAND RECENTLY ANNOUNCED.

$100M

THE REPORTED BUDGET OF **PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON’S** NEXT PROJECT – A ‘COMMERCIAL’, ‘CONTEMPORARY’ FEATURE STARRING **LEONARDO DICAPRIO**.

‘EVERY JUNE I TAKE THE QUIZ. GUESS WHAT, I HAVEN’T GOTTEN ON THE SHOW.’

EMMA STONE WANTS TO BE A REGULAR CONTESTANT ON QUIZ SHOW *JEOPARDY*.

GETTY

SPEED FREAKS

TOM CRUISE AND THE *TOP GUN: MAVERICK* TEAM – INCLUDING STARS MILES TELLER AND GLEN POWELL – ARE REUNITING FOR A HIGH-FLYING THREEQUEL.

GOOD THING

BAD THING

TOM WILKINSON RIP

BEST KNOWN FOR MEMORABLE SUPPORTING TURNS IN *MICHAEL CLAYTON*, *ETERNAL SUNSHINE...*, *THE FULL MONTY* AND MORE, ACTOR TOM WILKINSON HAS DIED AT 75.

‘IMAGINE IF ROSE’S LOVE INTEREST IN *TITANIC* WAS NAMED JIM, WOULD YOU EVEN CARE IF HE FROZE?’

JANUARY JONES HAS IT IN FOR THE NAME ‘JIM’.

‘IT’S ABOUT TIME THAT WE HAD A WOMAN COME FORWARD TO SHAPE A STORY IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY.’

SHARMEEN OBAID-CHINOY ON HER MILESTONE APPOINTMENT AS THE NEXT STAR WARS DIRECTOR.

A perilous sea crossing to Europe awaits

EXCLUSIVE

THE BOY IN THE BOAT

IO CAPITANO Matteo Garrone turns to a teen from Senegal for the ultimate hero origin story.

Gommorah and _Pinocchio_ director Matteo Garrone's films were previously confined to Italy's shores, but in his latest, _Io Capitano_, Sicily is the light at the end of a dark and dangerous tunnel. Teenager Seydou (Seydou Sarr) makes the journey there from Dakar, but faces torture, starvation, and enslavement before he even reaches the sea crossing. It's a tough but radically beautiful watch, filled with magic, agony and triumph. But sadly, as director Garrone tells _Teasers_, 'the reality is even worse. Sometimes, it's difficult to recreate things that are so violent they can look unbelievable. So this is an invocation of that violence rather than a representation.'

In 2023, nearly 3,000 people are estimated to have died attempting the crossing from north Africa to Europe (Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, reportedly once said she'd 'repatriate migrants back to their countries and then sink the boats that rescued them'). Garrone counters that narrative with 'the classic journey of a hero fighting against the system'. On a trip to Sicily over a decade ago, he met Mamadou Kouassi, who, aged 15, steered a boat of 250 refugees across the Mediterranean. Garrone emphasises: 'He'd never driven a boat! He didn't even know how to swim, and he saved all their lives.' Kouassi worked as script consultant on the film and is now settled near Naples. Garrone points him out, smiling in a sharp suit while checking in to the chic London hotel where the team is staying.

'It's difficult to recreate things that are so violent'
MATTEO GARRONE

Seydou (Seydou Sarr) and other migrants journey across Africa to the coast

It's hard not to shed a tear seeing a real-life hero get a happy ending.

Our hero's story has been a critical and commercial success in Italy ('It's my most popular movie!') and is hotly tipped for awards success. But Garrone was most overjoyed at the Venice Film Festival (where he won Best Director) watching Sarr, a shy teenager who had never acted before, win Best New Actor. 'I'm conscious of how much I owe him, so I was very, very happy. He didn't want to go to the casting, but like in the movie, his mother is blind and he lost his father, so he felt the responsibility to be the man of the family and accepted the role.'

Garrone can relate to that reluctance, having spent years unsure whether he was the right person to tell this story. 'I'm Italian and bourgeois. And I was afraid to exploit the subject matter and show the "poor migrant" from the point of view of the privileged,' the director says, adding: 'The movie chose me and the only way to not be crucified was to make the movie honest. I will die, and the movie will remain. I would prefer the opposite! But then the problem of the bourgeois Italian man will be in the past. No one will care about that if the movie is good.' **LEILA LATIF**

IO CAPITANO OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 5 APRIL.

ALTITUDE, GRETA DE LAZZARIS

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Zar Amir Ebrahimi (with Selina Zahednia) stars as a mother taking refuge from her abusive husband

EXCLUSIVE

HELTER SHELTER

SHAYDA Noora Niasari's Sundance-winning debut takes her back into childhood trauma...

When Noora Niasari was five, she was living in a women's shelter in Australia with her Iranian mother, a traumatic experience that she's now turned into her powerful debut feature, *Shayda*. 'It was just one of those experiences that really shaped me,' she says. 'And I knew that I wanted to see this story come to life, from an authentic, truthful place. I felt that I was the only person to do that, given my lived experience.'

Niasari gained help from her mother, who spent six months writing a memoir of their time in the shelter. 'I mean, it was incredibly cathartic for both of us, that six-month journalling process. I discovered so much about her and our story that I didn't know.' Over three years, she then wrote a story about a mother of one, Shayda, who escapes from her violent Iranian husband Hossein.

With the production aided by Cate Blanchett and her husband Andrew Upton's Dirty Films, to cast Shayda, Niasari was tipped off by actress Golshifteh Farahani. She introduced her to fellow French-Iranian Zar Amir Ebrahimi, who won Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival for *Holy Spider*. 'Within the first 10–15 seconds of seeing Zar's tape, I knew she was Shayda,' says Niasari. 'I knew she was everything that I was looking for. And more.'

Finding newcomer Selina Zahednia to play Shayda's young daughter, Mona, Niasari admits the process of exploring her past was tough. 'Every step of the way, from the writing to the production to post-production, I have had the support of a therapist, which was needed.' But for the writer/director, who saw the film win the Audience Award at Sundance last year, it was vital to speak up on such a universal horror.

'Domestic violence doesn't discriminate culture, or socio-economic situations… it affects all of us,' says Niasari, pointing to her homeland. 'It's a true epidemic in Australia. There's been around 60 documented women killed by their partners just this year [2023]. So it's an alarming statistic, and we need to do more about it all over the world.' **JAMES MOTTRAM**

SHAYDA OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 8 MARCH.

Q&A

Zar Amir Ebrahimi

In what ways did you relate to Shayda?
We share some little things, me and Shayda. I sometimes really miss her. I'm not a mother, though. So that was my first challenge. And I really concentrated to find this feeling, having to protect this child from this violence, from this life with a father.

Apart from talking to Noora, how did you research the role?
Her mum started to write stuff for Noora. So they shared this with me. Many pages, voices and photos. Many, many documents to just study and then I met her mother. And it's funny because her mother is a very different person, [from] this Shayda I created. She's so strong. And sometimes she just says, 'Zar, you brought too much emotion to this character. I'm not that person you know!'

Did you see it as a very Iranian story or more universal?
For these characters, [they] are all victims, of the situation or condition of that society or all these societies we are living in. In this story, it's not only about Iranian people or Iranian society. I know some French people who are the same... this misogyny with this patriarchal mindset. So it's not only about those women in shelter; they've all suffered. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

JANE ZHANG, GETTY, VERTIGO RELEASING

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NEXT BIG THING

TAZ SKYLAR... IS COOKING WITH GAS

Shooting to global attention as kick-ass sous-chef Sanji in Netflix hit *One Piece*, Taz Skylar is an actor, Olivier-nominated playwright and extreme sports enthusiast. He'll soon be seen in Martin Campbell's eco-thriller *Cleaner*, co-starring Daisy Ridley and Clive Owen, but first comes LFF-award-winning London crime story *Gassed Up*, which the multi-hyphenate co-wrote and stars in.

How did *Gassed Up* come about?
Bart Ruspoli and Hester Ruoff, the lead producers on the film, came to see my first play and have been mentors of mine. They brought this to me. I just thought it was a really cool concept. I started writing that in a van, bro, while surfing at the artificial wave in Bristol.

How did things change for you after *One Piece* exploded?
When the show came out, it was very intense night and day. A good analogy for it that I've found is: it's like I've ordered my life on Amazon. It was a delayed delivery, but it all came at once. And I didn't account for what to do with all the boxes.

Where did your interest in a writing and acting career come from?
I left school when I was 15, travelled around everywhere and ended up in San Sebastián making surfboards for five years. I used to go out and film surfers – kind of like Spike Jonze with skateboarders. I just had a feeling that making films was what I was meant to be doing.

You've already had a wildly varied career...
The only downside I could ever see to something as big as *One Piece* is forever [only] just being [part of] that. I do feel really lucky to have had, very quickly, the opportunities to go completely left-field. And this year has some things that I'm also really excited about, which are completely different again, before I do Season 2. **JORDAN FARLEY**

GASSED UP OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 FEBRUARY.

VERTIGO RELEASING

A community's rural idyll comes under threat in Ryûsuke Hamaguchi's new film (Ryô Nishikawa as Hana, pictured)

EXCLUSIVE

CARRY ON GLAMPING

EVIL DOES NOT EXIST The *Drive My Car* director returns with an ambiguous award winner...

One of the most remarkable aspects of the 2022 Oscars was the success of *Drive My Car*. Ryûsuke Hamaguchi's three-hour opus was nominated for four Oscars, including Best Picture, and won the Best International Feature award. So how's it been since then? 'To be honest, my life hasn't changed that much,' says Hamaguchi. 'In fact, if young Japanese directors today came over to see where I live, I think they'll be disappointed in what they find.'

If this suggests a modesty to the 45-year-old writer/director, it also comes with a fierce ambition. His latest film, *Evil Does Not Exist*, was spawned from his composer Eiko Ishibashi, who also scored *Drive My Car*. She proposed to Hamaguchi that he shoot some images to accompany a live performance of her music – a silent short film ultimately titled *Gift*. From that, Hamaguchi's feature emerged, as he built a story around some of those images.

'When this opportunity came about, it felt like a different opportunity. And that's something I wanted to do,' he says. 'I couldn't rely on dialogue in the same way that I've always relied on with a lot of my films. So I really had to think about what visual motifs I can have at the centre of the film.' A case in point is the wordless opening 10 minutes in the rural setting of Mizubiki Village, some two-and-a-half hours from Tokyo, as we're introduced to odd-job man Takumi (Hitoshi Omika).

A likeable figure, Takumi is very much involved in a town meeting when a Tokyo company glides in with proposals to turn a patch of land into a 'glamping' site – something that seems replete with environmental problems. 'This very small story reflects our society in some ways,' says the director. 'For example, the fact that it is a very sloppy plan, and yet it's trying to be forcefully pushed forward… these things happen similarly in our lives.'

'This very small story reflects our society in some ways' RYÛSUKE HAMAGUCHI

A Tokyo company's plans for a luxury campsite cause tension

Already Hamaguchi's film has won the second-place Grand Jury Prize at last year's Venice Film Festival, and Best Film at the London Film Festival back in the autumn, which may come as a surprise to some. When the film bowed in Venice last September, some critics were baffled by the third-act conclusion – 'an ending that pushes its ambiguousness to confounding lengths,' noted *The Hollywood Reporter*.

For fear of spoilers, Hamaguchi understandably doesn't want to discuss it too much, admitting it's 'confusing… hopefully in a good way'. But it rather typifies his daring approach, and why he's now celebrated as one of world cinema's brightest talents. 'I don't want films to be too chummy with the audience,' he says. 'Those are the kinds of films I like and want to continue to make.' JAMES MOTTRAM

EVIL DOES NOT EXIST OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 MARCH.

MODERN FILMS

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BETWEEN TAKES

JEFFREY WRIGHT

THE *AMERICAN FICTION* STAR ON SPECTACLES, SAGE AND SPURS...

What do you do when you first get to set?
It's not the first thing but among the first things we do as actors is put on another set of clothes. I've always recognised that it's a peculiar little ritual that we go through. For [*American Fiction* character] Monk, I found his glasses myself in a store the morning before we shot. They'd given me dozens of choices, and I just did not find the one that I wanted. I wanted them to be owlish. We were filming in Boston. I was riding my bicycle around and I went to a couple of different places to see if I could find them. And once I had them, that was OK. I found his face.

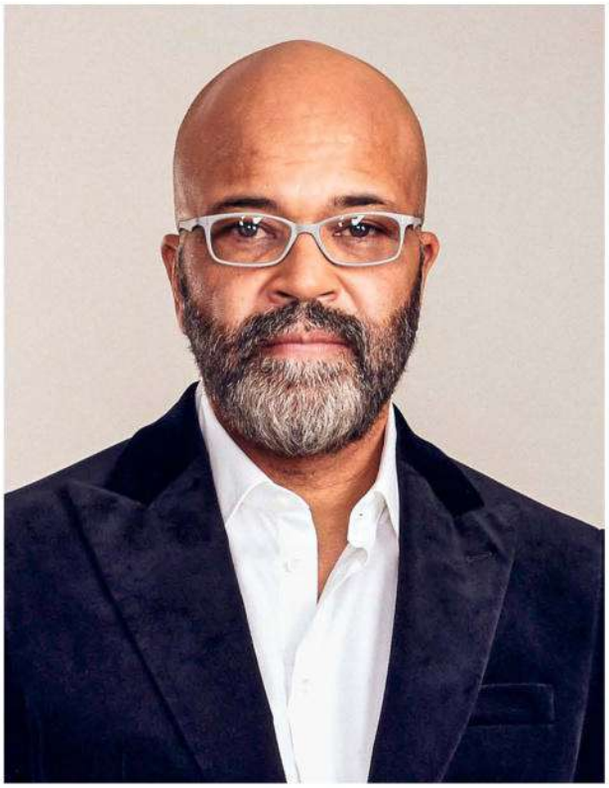
How was filming in Boston?
Well, I went to school in Massachusetts and I'd done a play early in my career in Boston. I had not been a fan of that town at all. In fact, the opposite. But working on this film actually made me love Boston. It is a town that's very well-suited for our story, because it's a smart town in spite of some of the silliness that I've experienced there.

Are you a hot- or a cold-lunch guy?
On this, I was a cold-lunch guy. I found this salad niçoise that was so good, I pretty much had that every day.

Do you ever sleep on set?
If I need to, I'll try to get a quick nap in. When I was filming *Westworld* we would shoot on average 16- or 17-hour days. We shot 21 hours once. So, I would catch a little snooze here and there.

Have you learned any skills on a set that you've taken with you?
When I was working on *Ride with the Devil* with Ang Lee many years ago, we rode every day, and we trained prior. And I absolutely loved it. And I'm still reasonably handy. I still have a bit of cow in me, as the wranglers would say.

What do you take on set? A scented candle? Cleansing sage to burn?
I've been on some sets when sage would have been necessary to burn. In fact, it might have even been better to burn the entire thing down. I've thankfully had the good fortune to avoid them of late.



'I'VE BEEN ON SOME SETS WHEN... IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO BURN THE ENTIRE THING DOWN'

With Erika Alexander in *American Fiction*

GETTY; CURZON

What's been your worst on-set experience?
There have been a few. The worst set to be on is when the leaders of that set, who are reasonably intelligent people, conspire to be dumb. I've always been able to identify good words on a page. But I have gotten better at choosing collaborators. I've also come to understand that it's who you're working with that determines the quality of the experience. There are a few experiences that I've buried in someone else's yard, not my own, because I don't want it to exist in my realm any more.

And your best?
American Fiction is on that top shelf. *Ride with the Devil*, *Westworld*... Working with Wes Anderson is up there. Working with George Wolfe on *Rustin*. The Bond sets are on the top shelf – good fun. Working on *No Time to Die* with Felix's last scene – oh my god, I had a ball. We were filming out in Pinewood, in the huge tank there, with millions of gallons of water in this rig that we would sink in. It was like an amusement park ride every day.

Have you ever stolen anything from a set?
Legend has it that Harrison Ford had a clause in his contract that said 'Whatever I touch on set, I can have' [laughs]. For me, it depends on who the character is, and what the experience was. I borrowed a book or two from the *American Fiction* set. I've got some cue cards for Anthony Hopkins from *Westworld* that he wrote a little note on.

When we filmed *The Batman* I won a bet with our first AD – he supported Spurs and I support Arsenal. I'm a proper Gooner. He lost. I now have, in my possession, Gordon's Gotham Police Department badge. **JANE CROWTHER**

AMERICAN FICTION OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 2 FEBRUARY.

Dakota Johnson stars as Cassandra Webb, a paramedic who gains clairvoyant powers

EXCLUSIVE

THE SIXTH SENSE

MADAME WEB Dakota Johnson brings wit and grit to Sony's clairvoyant-superhero-origin-story thriller.

When looking for someone to helm a woman-led superhero movie, turning to a director who's been involved with one of the best-received comic-book series of the past decade, *Jessica Jones*, makes perfect sense.

'There's a groundedness, a grittiness, to *Jessica Jones*, which is definitely part of the cinematic vernacular of *Madame Web*,' British director S.J. Clarkson, who oversaw two episodes of *Jessica Jones*, tells *Teasers*. 'They're both loners, a little bit abrasive, a bit quirky, and on the outer edges of things. With JJ, she had PTSD. That [sense of] reality to it was its success in a way. I suppose it's the same with *Madame Web*.'

An origin story set in Sony's Spider-Man Universe, the film offers a different angle on Madame Web – aka Cassandra Webb – to the comic books. On the page, she's an elderly blind woman with 'fully fledged' clairvoyant powers; in the movie, she's a 30-something super-powered newbie. 'In many ways, the character traits are the same,' says Clarkson. 'You pore through the comics, and you go through what the skill set is, and we've embraced and adopted those.'

Clarkson's career encompasses directing jobs on high-profile TV series including *Heroes*, *Dexter*, *Orange Is the New Black* and *Succession*. She worked on Netflix Marvel team-up series *The Defenders* and helmed an unreleased

SONY

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Game of Thrones prequel pilot ('I'm sorry the fans got denied it.'). An eclectic mix, in Clarkson's own words, giving her experience in multiple genres.

Producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura describes *Madame Web* as a thriller, while Clarkson tosses around words like 'cerebral' and 'psychological'. Dakota Johnson stars as the titular character, a paramedic who is brought together with three young women – who are all destined for powerful futures.

Johnson, says Clarkson, balances 'the wit, the humour and the abrasiveness with the compassion of the character really well'. Sydney Sweeney, meanwhile, portrays comic-book Spider-Woman Julia Carpenter; Isabela Merced plays Aña (Anya) Corazón aka Spider-Girl; and Celeste O'Connor is Mattie Franklin, another one-time comic-book Spider-Woman. The foursome start off 'not necessarily getting on', reveals Clarkson, but go on to form 'a sort of family'.

Acclaimed actor Tahar Rahim (*A Prophet*, *The Mauritanian*) plays another character from the pages of the comics, villain Ezekiel 'Zeke' Sims. 'He's not afraid to be intense,' teases Clarkson. 'There's a level of ambiguity to his character; other layers.'

'There's a groundedness that is part of the cinematic vernacular of *Madame Web*'
S.J. CLARKSON

While Sony Pictures stresses the standalone, 'meanwhile, in another universe…' of it all, that won't stop devotees of the intricately woven screen universe – that sees Disney's MCU sharing Spider-Man with Sony – wanting to know precisely where *Madame Web* is caught within it.

'I'm really excited for you to see the film and the potential of what it could be, that's for sure,' says Clarkson enigmatically. 'But I would probably say watch this space.' Your spidey sense ought to be tingling right about now.

KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER

MADAME WEB OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 14 FEBRUARY.

5 THINGS

PORT IN A STORM

THE WAY Michael Sheen's allegorical drama of a working-class Welsh family on the run.

1 THERE'S A CREATIVE DREAM TEAM

Three-part drama *The Way* unites idiosyncratic documentarian Adam Curtis (*The Power of Nightmares*), prolific playwright/screenwriter James Graham (*Sherwood*) and actor Michael Sheen, here making his directorial debut. 'The idea came before the pandemic and was very simple,' says Sheen. 'What if a British family were doing what a Syrian family were doing at the time, suddenly having to leave their home and go on this dangerous journey? Adam is very good about layers of power and would challenge us to keep things believable at all times. Once we started talking about the scope, we needed a writer and James seemed the perfect fit.'

2 FAMILY IS AT ITS HEART

The Driscolls are riven by unresolved resentments. Geoff (Steffan Rhodri) is a shop steward at the steelworks, Dee (Mali Harries) the engine of the community, Thea (Sophie Melville) a copper and Owen (Callum Scott Howells) a lost soul drifting into trouble. 'Each has a version of past events incompatible with the others,' explains Sheen, who cameos as Geoff's late father and 'legendary figure' Denny. 'They're a fractured family forced to come together because they have to escape, but only if those festering stories are brought into the light.'

'It's a cross between *The Royle Family* and *Apocalypse Now*'
MICHAEL SHEEN

3 IT ISN'T PO-FACED

The Driscolls go on the run, hunted by Luke Evans' mercenary, after 'an inciting incident' at the steelworks turns the town into a crucible of post-industrial conflict and culture wars, haunted by ghosts of past uprisings. And yet there is always humour, with Sheen describing the tone as 'a cross between *The Royle Family* and *Apocalypse Now*' in its blend of big ideas in a domestic setting. 'We wanted watching it to feel like living in this post-Brexit culture where you're never quite sure if you're in a horror film or a sitcom.'

4 IT WAS A HOMECOMING FOR SHEEN

As soon as the setting was determined as Port Talbot, Sheen knew he had to direct, and he wrangled hundreds of committed locals for crowd scenes ranging from a highly charged town-hall meeting to riots on the hottest day of the year. 'It has been a real treat to film a story in Wales that is both actually about Wales and something new,' he says. 'Although, while people were excited something on this scale was happening, I knew it would eventually start to be: "Michael Sheen has shut bloody Station Road down again, I can't get to Tesco!"'

5 IT OFFERS A MUCH-NEEDED DOSE OF OPTIMISM

'Sometimes things get so far apart that they can snap,' muses Sheen. 'We ask whether it's possible to heal division and whether we can let go of the old stories to imagine something new? Our piece is very optimistic in both those respects, but it's not providing the answers. Instead, it's exploring the questions and offering some context, because what is true of the Driscolls could be seen as being true of the country.' **GABRIEL TATE**

THE WAY IS COMING SOON TO BBC1.

Owen (Callum Scott Howells) gets stuck in as civil unrest comes to a Welsh steel town

BBC

The film is set in 1971, when the French military still had a presence in Madagascar

EXCLUSIVE

BEHIND PARADISE

RED ISLAND A coming-of-age-tale that creatively explores France's colonial past.

Charlie Vauselle as Thomas, the son of a French army officer

From Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans* to Charlotte Wells' *Aftersun*, autofiction films have been popular of late with both veteran and newer directors. The long-awaited follow-up to his award-winning AIDS epidemic drama *120 BPM*, *Red Island* sees French filmmaker Robin Campillo mine ostensibly similar semi-autobiographical details, here delicately exploring specific social and political issues. Without spoiling anything, however, *Red Island*'s structure and concluding POV prove decidedly more slippery than those other recent coming-of-age gems.

Campillo's film is set in Madagascar in 1971, during a curious transitional period for the country. Located off the southeastern coast of Africa, the island nation formally became a republic independent of France in 1960, but various ties to their former colonisers remained in place, including the continued presence of French soldiers.

It's during this time that eight-year-old Thomas (Charlie Vauselle) is living on a French military base in Madagascar with his family. 'I realised there was another metamorphosis in my life when society changed,' Campillo tells *Teasers* of mining his life for source material once more, after *120 BPM*. 'It was at the last colonial destination of France, Madagascar, where I was as a child.'

Like Sammy Fabelman in Spielberg's film, Campillo's Thomas tends to snoop on his parents when they're unaware. He's also drawn to flights of fancy, though comic books fuel his imagination a little more than films. Campillo begins *Red Island* with a delightful cold open, in which young masked crusader Fantômette fights criminals. But in Thomas' real life, concepts of good and bad are not so black and white.

'It's this moment when you're a child,' says Campillo, 'where you have evidence of something wrong behind this fairy tale, that the grown-ups are overacting in front of you, but you don't fully understand.' This refers to the disintegrating marriage of Thomas' parents (Nadia Tereszkiewicz and Quim Gutiérrez), but also to the film's political context.

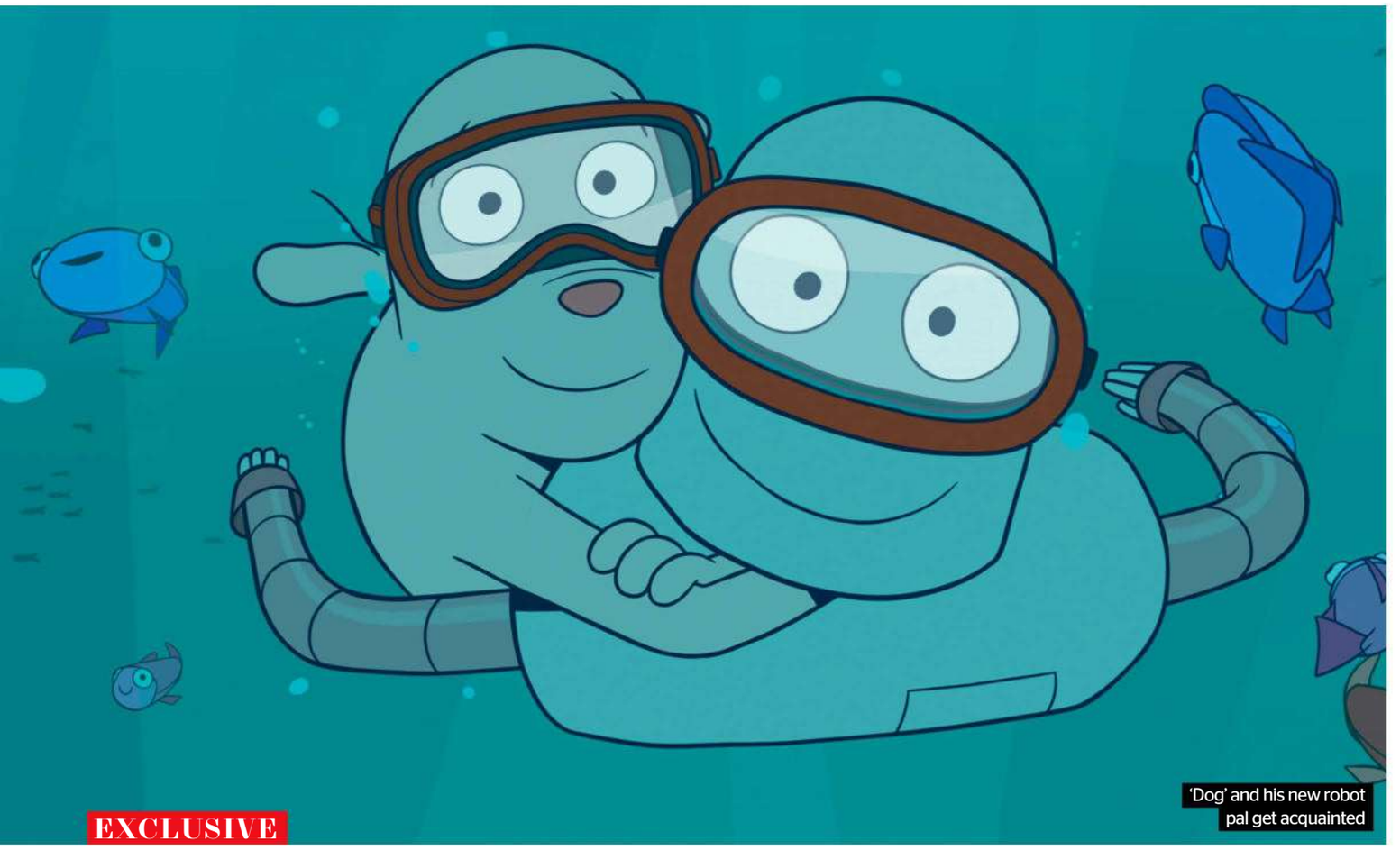
'You have a lot of colonial films that show people as monsters'
ROBIN CAMPILLO

'You have a lot of films about colonialism that show people as monsters,' Campillo says. 'That doesn't help because it's a political responsibility to acknowledge that these people were our families. To talk about monsters doesn't explain anything. For instance, it was very hard for me to recreate something I heard from my mother, when she said her father didn't want her to marry a Spanish man, who he thought looked Arab. It's a racist, xenophobic sentence, and my mother was saying it in the sweetest way.

'In France now, people are saying cruel and stupid things, as though they're normal. As though there's no violence in what they're saying, especially regarding the third generation of people coming from the countries that were former colonial places. Which is why, for me, it's important to explore this.' **JOSH SLATER-WILLIAMS**

RED ISLAND OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 MARCH.

CURZON



'Dog' and his new robot pal get acquainted

EXCLUSIVE

DOG DAYS

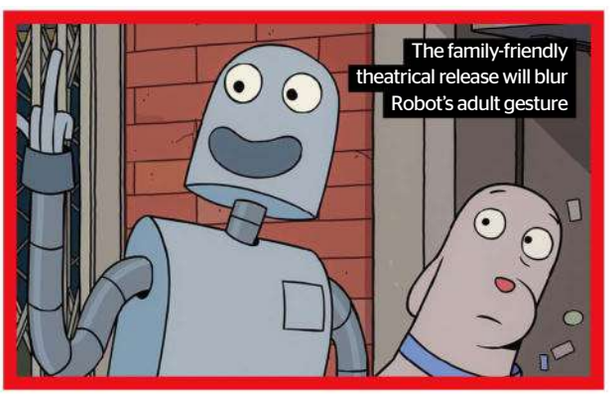
ROBOT DREAMS Pablo Berger's animated 'silent' movie brings the noise.

The film of *Robot Dreams* is like a lasagne,' announces its Spanish director, Pablo Berger. 'There are different layers.' It's a fair point. Adapted from the hit 2007 graphic novel by Sara Varon, this tale of a dog who builds and befriends a robot can easily be enjoyed, Pixar style, by all types of filmgoers. 'I would love to think that *Robot Dreams* caters something to different audiences,' adds Berger, when *Teasers* meets with him in London. 'I would love to have in the same screening room kids, cinephiles, critics, casual film viewers.'

The film marks Berger's first animated project following three live-action features, including 2017's *Abracadabra*, and he certainly approached it from a movie buff's perspective. With no dialogue in the film, he created a silent movie inspired by Buster Keaton, Jacques Tati and, most of all, Charlie Chaplin. 'What [Chaplin] did with *City Lights*... it was already 1931, the sound era had started. But he wanted to tell a complex story only using visual storytelling. So in that sense, we were always watching his film while we were preparing this film.'

After gaining the rights from Varon in 2018, Berger was given 'carte blanche' from the author to do as he wished with the adaptation. One of the major changes was to clarify the setting – in the book, just an anonymous urban conurbation occupied by animals as if they were humans. 'In the book, the protagonists were Robot and Dog,' he says. 'And in the film, the protagonists are Robot, Dog and New York. This is something I brought to the adaptation – New York will be a third protagonist.'

'In the film, the protagonists are Robot, Dog and New York'
PABLO BERGER



The family-friendly theatrical release will blur Robot's adult gesture

All through, Berger wanted to keep the spirit of the book alive, especially when the story's canine protagonist gets separated from his new robot chum and must scheme a way to retrieve him. 'I think it's not like a children's book, where everybody's happy and everybody's good. It's closer to real life. I think that somehow, in the last two decades, especially the last decade, children's films, they've been too sweet and too far away from real life. That's what this film was made for.'

With two 'pop-up' studios set up in Spain, an estimated 130 animators worked on the project, in person. 'I went there for two years, every day meeting with the director of animation, with animators,' explains Berger. 'So for me it was something very different from what I have experienced as a director.' Using old-school, hand-drawn techniques, 'we wanted to make the best possible 2D animation,' he adds. And if they ever got stuck? They looked to Japan and the work of Studio Ghibli's Hayao Miyazaki for inspiration. 'We'd always say, "What would Miyazaki do with this problem?"'

JAMES MOTTRAM

ROBOT DREAMS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 22 MARCH.

CURZON

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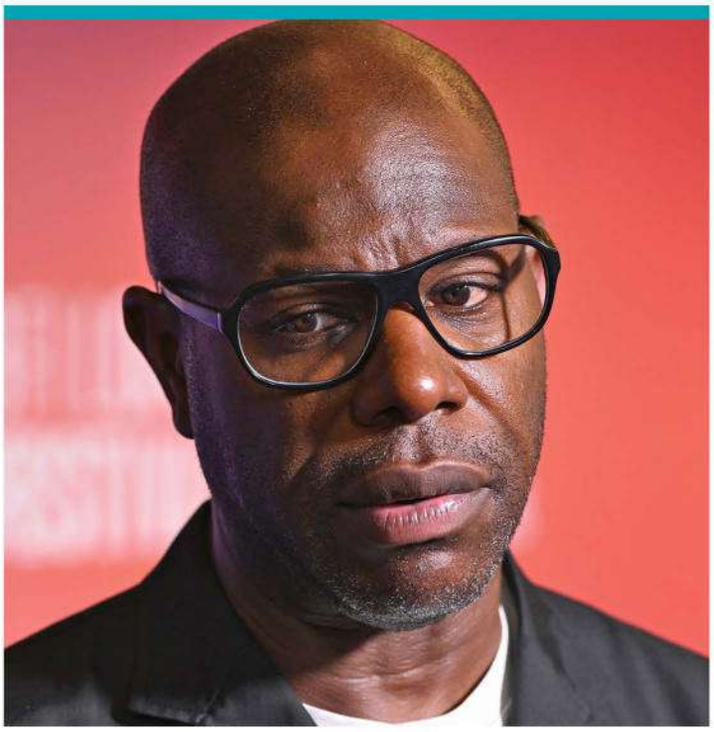
THE HERO



STEVE MCQUEEN
THE ACCLAIMED BRITISH DIRECTOR BEHIND A HARROWING NEW DOC.

Listing Sir Steve McQueen's accomplishments could fill an entire magazine. The Oscar/BAFTA/Turner-winning filmmaker and artist has had a pioneering career: Solomon Northup's harrowing journey in *12 Years a Slave*, stamps commemorating fallen soldiers, installations re-staging Buster Keaton stunts, TV episodes about a party in Ladbroke Grove, and an upcoming historical drama that sees Saoirse Ronan caught in the Blitz. His latest is *Occupied City*, an epic documentary adapted from his wife Bianca Stigter's non-fiction book on the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam.

How was it making *Occupied City* about Amsterdam and then *Blitz* about the same period in London?
Coming from London, the Blitz was always promoted as 'us against the world' and heroic. But 27 years ago, when I first met Bianca and walked around Amsterdam, it was deafening that this place was occupied. I'd come across sculptures and ask what they were for: 'And this one is to commemorate when a group of people were executed, and this one is where a German soldier shot someone dead.' The films are confronting that contrast in a way. A city always has a lot of layers, and this history is not that long ago. The recent past is difficult to cope with, and so we end up in this cycle of trauma and amnesia.

Cinema often sugar-coats the past and is so bad at predicting the future…
Isn't it crazy? If someone wrote a horror movie and the aliens are coming or whatever, that's fine. But if Covid was a horror movie, and you wrote that people just wanted to go back to work and didn't try to run away, they'd throw a script back in your face. And if someone told you what we know now 10 years ago, they'd think you were mad…

Does your work pick out the perversion of that past?
I think 'perversion' is a very good word because these things are normalised. I don't want them to be normal.

Be it movies or artwork, why do you shoot on film?
It is extremely important to shoot on film because it's a ritual. I grew up shooting on Super 8, so the idea of ritual and preparation was so important. These stories are very precious, and capturing them has to be conducted in the same light. Having those conversations about how we're going to shoot it… you're predicting what will happen, which is weird. In some ways, it's about finding it with the camera and the crew and everybody being in sync to both negotiate and capture the present.

Why does memorialising the easily forgotten often come up in your work?
Has it? Memorialising what? What other works?

Like in the film installation *Ashes*, you show this young man in Grenada and then after he's murdered you return to give him a proper tombstone.
Absolutely. He was a beautiful guy, and he was buried in an unmarked grave. So going and giving him a grave that may be around for the next 200 years or so could pull on his memory. It's a strange world. It's like with the Holocaust or with slavery; it's an abstract number, but it happened to a man, a woman, a child individually. If you can get that sense across, you're on the right path.

But it's easier to forget?
Yes, and a good example is when we went to Washington and were invited to Obama's White House. We discovered the slave pen where Solomon was, which is a sort of air base now, and the hotel he was kidnapped from. The buildings were there, but no plaque, no sign, nothing. So I feel that *12 Years a Slave* and *Occupied City* are a little bit archaeological. There's layers of history, layers of time, but whether it's 1840 or 1940, we're also always talking about the present day. **LEILA LATIF**

'WE DISCOVERED THE SLAVE PEN WHERE SOLOMON WAS… NO PLAQUE, NO SIGN, NOTHING'

(From top) *Hunger*, *Occupied City* and *12 Years a Slave*

OCCUPIED CITY OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 9 FEBRUARY.

GETTY, MODERN FILMS, E1 ENTERTAINMENT

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DESERT POWER

LIKE A COLOSSAL SANDWORM RACING TOWARDS THE RHYTHMIC BEAT OF A THUMPER, *DUNE: PART TWO* IS ALMOST UPON US. AND THIS TIME, IT'S WAR. *TOTAL FILM* RETURNS TO ARRAKIS WITH WRITER/DIRECTOR DENIS VILLENEUVE AND HIS (INTER)STELLAR CAST TO SPILL THE SPICE ON THE SCI-FI EVENT OF THE YEAR.

WORDS JORDAN FARLEY

Part Two sees the confrontation between Paul (Timothée Chalamet) and Feyd-Rautha (Austin Butler)

The word Muad'Dib has several meanings in the world of *Dune*. It is both a small, saucer-eared mouse that scurries across the desolate surface of Arrakis, and the chosen Fremen name of Paul Atreides, symbolising his destiny as one wise in the ways of the desert. For *Dune* director Denis Villeneuve and his star Timothée Chalamet, the word has added significance – 'Muad'Dib time' was the message Villeneuve sent Chalamet when *Dune: Part Two* got the greenlight in October 2021.

'There were moments over the course of shooting the first film where I was yearning for Paul, after he left Caladan, to not still be in the process of formation,' Chalamet explains, speaking to *Total Film* in early January, tousled hair screen-perfect even for a Zoom call. 'My most common way of expressing that was: "When does Paul become Muad'Dib?" [Denis] would always preach patience. In sending me that text, it was clear that this is the story where we would see Paul come into his own.'

Javier Bardem returns as Fremen leader Stilgar

Long-awaited following that agonising cliffhanger and an excruciating, strike-related delay; *Dune: Part Two* is the concluding instalment of Villeneuve's breathtakingly tactile rendering of Frank Herbert's seminal 1965 novel. *Part One* was a rare genre blockbuster embraced by audiences and typically sniffy awards bodies, cleaning up in the technical categories at the 2022 Oscars by winning best cinematography, editing, sound, visual effects, production design and score.

The decision to split the film in two ultimately proved as wise as the humble Muad'Dib – ask David Lynch who had a paltry 45 minutes to cover the same ground as *Dune: Part Two* in his critically compromised 1984 adaptation – but it was a risky strategy that meant, until those opening weekend numbers came in, a conclusive sequel was far from guaranteed.

'When I was shooting [*Part One*], I remember saying to myself, "If that's the only movie, I want to be at peace." So I gave everything,' Villeneuve recalls during a conversation with *Total Film* in Madrid, where the life-long fan of Herbert's novel has just screened the first 12 minutes of *Dune: Part Two*, and further select scenes, in all their IMAX glory to a mouth-agape *TF*. 'Of course, for me, it was not about box office. It was about: do people feel that you have been a traitor [to the novel], or does the world accept your adaptation? I felt that it was a "yes", and that I was able to go on to make *Part Two*.'

CULTURE SHOCK

Co-writing the film's script with returning screenwriter John Spaihts, Villeneuve describes the process of adapting *Part Two* as 'more challenging' than their work on the world-building first instalment because 'storytelling-wise, it's more dense'. Much of that complexity can be attributed to the fact that Paul and his Bene Gesserit mother Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) fully embrace Fremen culture in *Part Two*, having earned their place among the community of Sietch Tabr, under the leadership of Javier Bardem's Stilgar. Then there's the small matter of Paul stepping into his cataclysmic fate as prescient super-being the Kwisatz Haderach, and all that entails for the future of their world.

'One of things that I'm proudest of is how Timothée Chalamet portrayed Paul, and how he transformed in front of the camera from a teenager into that messianic figure – a

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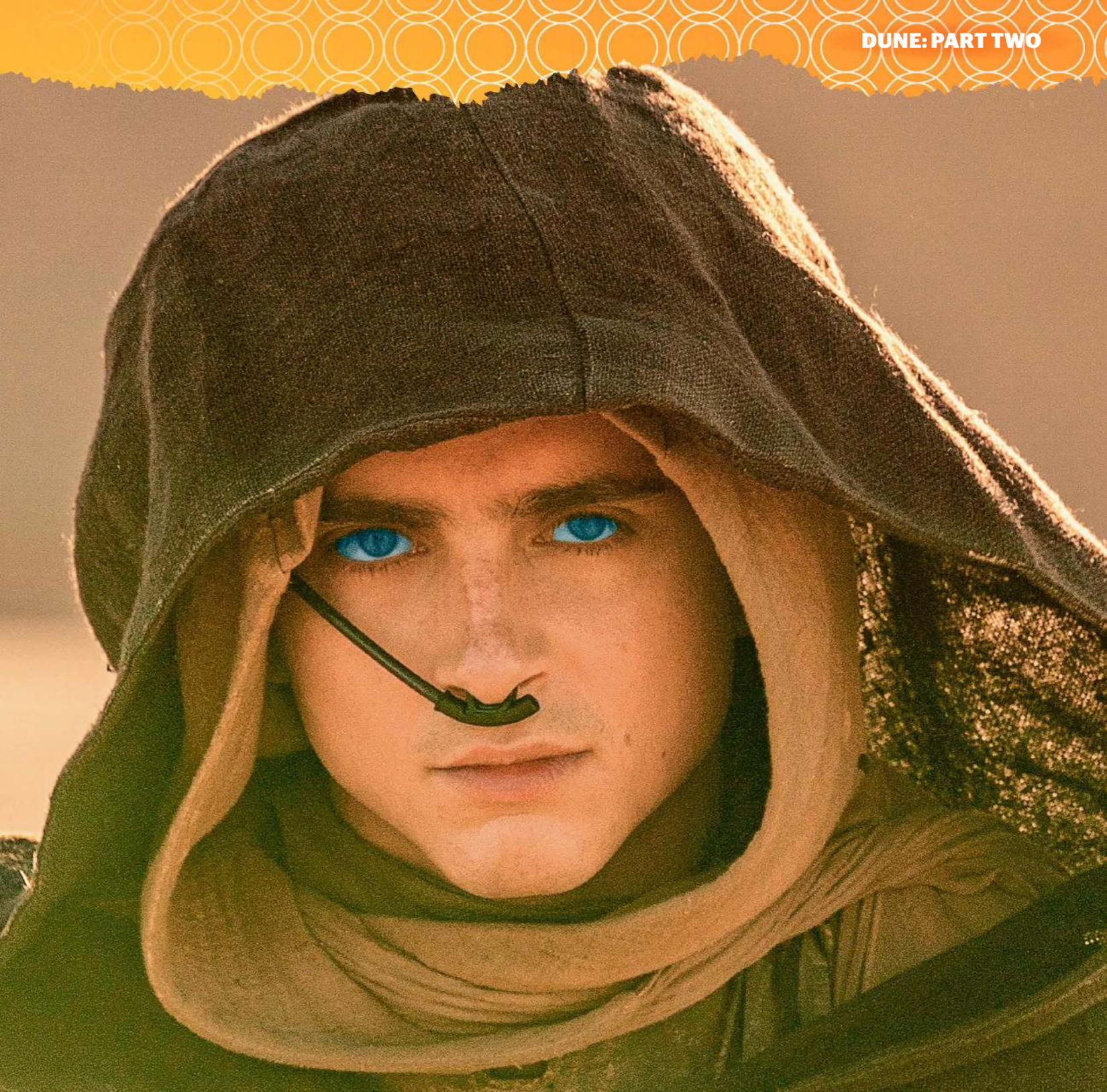

"ONE OF THE THINGS I'M PROUDEST OF IS HOW TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET PORTRAYED PAUL, AND HOW HE TRANSFORMED FROM A TEENAGER INTO THAT MESSIANIC FIGURE"

DENIS VILLENEUVE

Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson) continues to fight for her son

tormented young man trying to deal with his destiny,' says Villeneuve. 'There are scenes where he has to scream in Fremen in front of hundreds of [supporting artists],' adds Ferguson. 'That's scary. And the resonance with which he does it, and the power with which he does it – it was mesmerising.'

'It doesn't make his journey so righteous,' says Chalamet, who describes the process of playing Paul over four years as a 'surreally lived-in experience' having 'come into his own' as a person in parallel with the character. 'That's what Frank Herbert's warning really was, in not only *Dune*, but [sequel novel] *Dune Messiah*. To be wary of charismatic leaders; to be wary of people that hold too much power. That's something Paul wrestles with in the second movie, where he's actively resisting a certain path that calls on him to be a complete leader, because he knows what comes with it.'

The Fremen are initially sceptical of Paul, but many come to believe he is their long-prophesied 'Lisan al Gaib' (off-world saviour), including Stilgar. 'In the beginning, he doesn't really know if he trusts this new kid. But he wishes he will be The One…' Bardem tells *TF*. 'Something changes, and then there is a blind faith – as with many religions.' Bardem made an outsized impression as Stilgar in *Part One*, despite appearing on screen for approximately 12 seconds. It was the promise of *Part Two* – and a pledge that he'd get to ride a sandworm ('Denis kept his word,' Bardem smiles) – that made Villeneuve's initial offer irresistible.

'Denis said, "I'm going to offer you a movie that you are not in, but if there is a second one, you will be in it." I was like, "I'm in!"' chuckles Bardem, who has a much more significant role to play in *Part Two*. 'It was a different game for me. It was a chance to be more immersed in the process, and to develop the character to a beautiful, vulnerable place.' Stilgar finds he is united in belief with Jessica, 'two people who are very religious in their way' according to Ferguson. 'The moment that she realises Stilgar believes in her son – there's nothing stronger for her. That sets the bar for their relationship.'

SAND-STRUCK ROMANCE

In contrast to Stilgar and Jessica, Zendaya's Fremen Chani may believe in Paul as a person, and even come to love him, but she puts no stock in prophecies. 'In the book Chani meets Paul and is like, "Alright, this is the guy. I support you." Whereas in our film, in no way does she bend how she feels,' says Zendaya, who 'longed' for more time in the world of *Dune* after filming

"EVEN WHEN CHANI IS FALLING IN LOVE, SHE STILL DOESN'T LIKE WHAT PAUL REPRESENTS"

ZENDAYA

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for little more than a week on *Part One*. 'She's strong in her convictions. Even when she's falling in love, she still doesn't like what [Paul] represents.'

Chalamet describes Chani as Paul's 'moral compass', while according to Villeneuve 'the core of this film is the love story between Paul Atreides and Chani', which may account for the director's claim that *Part Two* is his most 'emotional' movie to date. This star-crossed romance, which is kindled in the magic-hour glow of the deep desert in Abu Dhabi and Jordan – enough to make anyone fall in love – grounds a gargantuan story about worlds at war according to Zendaya. 'Because it's so high-stakes you have to go back to something that's really human, which is love,' the actor says. 'It's something everyone can relate to, and feel connected to.'

Like Stilgar then, Chani's limited role in *Part One* will be greatly expanded in *Part Two*, even beyond the scope of the novel, with Villeneuve claiming that 'as the movie progresses, there's a shift in the main character, and Chani becomes my reference as a point of view'. Zendaya notes that 'what Denis does very well is take the female characters more deeply into consideration' in a way that was rarely the case for science-fiction in the 60s. 'He was really able to build out a strong sense of [Chani's] own views and life. It wasn't entirely like she's at the will of who she's in love with. I did feel a particular sense of care for what Chani represents in his films.'

Jessica similarly benefits from this sense of care. Villeneuve even highlights her increased presence as the single biggest difference between the novel and his adaptation. 'Strangely, Jessica's more in the background in the second part [of the novel] – I thought that was not proper,' he asserts. 'She's still Lady Jessica, the main architect of the story. I thought that was a very powerful idea that was not sustained in the book. I made sure that she has the character presence in the second part.'

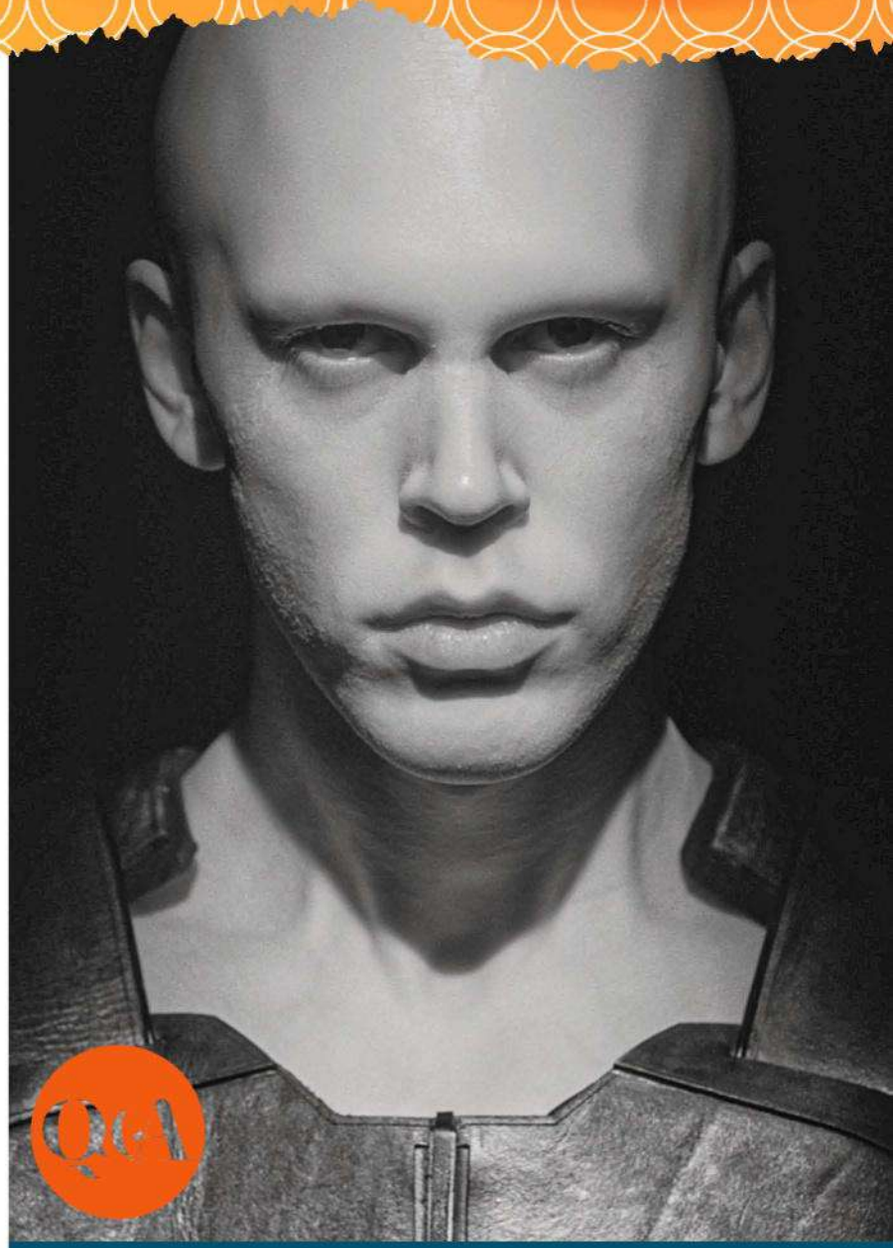
'Jessica wants to protect Paul, but constantly has her own agenda,' Ferguson points out, speaking to *TF* on a day off from filming the second season of Apple TV+ series *Silo*. 'She will go on her own journey to fight and gather strength in a different form.' As Bardem explains, Jessica becomes a 'powerful, religious figure in the Fremen world that really is able to manipulate people's beliefs' after undertaking a dangerous ritual involving the Waters of Life. 'That's one of my favourite scenes [in the film],' Ferguson smiles. 'For Jessica, no decision is made without understanding the harsh – sometimes lethal – consequences of that choice. But she's forced to try to take control back.'

There's also Jessica's pregnancy to consider, which has paradigm-shifting consequences in the world of *Dune*. It's the only topic Villeneuve won't go near today ('I need to keep some mystery,' he says with a smile), but Ferguson offers a cryptic tease: 'Having a Bene Gesserit pregnant, we can say, is not like me being pregnant. It's a whole other journey.'

FRIENDS REUNITED

Of the other major surviving members of House Atreides, invaluable Mentat Thufir Hawat (Stephen McKinley Henderson) becomes an unwilling servant of the Baron (Stellan Skarsgård), while revenge against the Harkonnen is front of mind for Gurney Halleck (Josh Brolin) once he's reunited with Paul. 'It's very personal to him,' says Brolin, who turned to the novel to inform Halleck's backstory. 'But he doesn't think he's in a position where he can enact revenge until that surprise happens, and he can get back on a trajectory that he's very comfortable with.'

Brolin got to fulfil two years-in-the-making dreams on *Dune: Part Two* – a proper scene with Javier Bardem ('Denis



Q&A

FEYD TO BLACK

Austin Butler on *Dune: Part Two*'s deadly, charismatic Harkonnen assassin...

How did Denis pitch Feyd-Rautha to you?

Denis described him to me as having a psychotic nature, but yet there's something sort of seductive about him as well. And he's hungry for power. I started thinking: well, how did he grow up? What would his voice sound like? How would he breathe? How would he move? That was the real fun, where you start filling in all those details, and putting meat on the bone.

You famously immersed yourself in Elvis Presley. Could you have done that with Rautha?

With Feyd, I didn't think it would be healthy to live in that head-space 24 hours a day. So I created rituals around it in the hair and make-up chair where I could start shifting my mind over. That allowed more freedom to feel that I could go further in the film, because I knew that it wasn't going to get out of hand. Once you know that, then it's so much fun, because he's so different from me. There's a challenge in that, but there's something liberating about immersing yourself in this other way of being. There were possibilities that don't exist with other characters that were very fun to explore.

Sting famously donned winged underpants to play Feyd-Rautha. Did you lobby for the pants to make a return?

I think he did them so much justice that I had to do something completely of my own [laughs]. How do you follow that? I think he looks great in them... I love that movie, and I love Sting as a musician and as an actor. I feel honoured to be embodying this role that he had the opportunity to. **JORDAN FARLEY**

Chani (Zendaya) believes in Paul, but not the prophecies about him

wrote a scene of dialogue for us, because we both said, "On *No Country for Old Men*, we didn't share the screen. Give us a scene!"' Bardem chuckles), while Gurney will finally break out the nine-stringed baliset after a performance filmed for *Part One* was left on the cutting room floor. 'Tonally, he was right [to cut] the first one,' Brolin nods. 'This one, the placement is right. I wrote the lyrics, and Hans [Zimmer] wrote the music. I didn't think the scene would turn out as well as it did, but I'm really happy with it.'

Brolin has nothing but praise for the film after a recent screening, in particular the 'great new blood that enlivened what may have turned out to be like going back to Season 2 of a series'. Chief among the new additions is Austin Butler (see boxout p37), who drops all hints of that lived-in Elvis performance and dons an impressive bald cap, as Feyd-Rautha – a psychotic Harkonnen killer, and favoured nephew of the Baron.

'Feyd is a mirror of Paul. He's a perfect nemesis,' teases Villeneuve, who cast Butler in spring 2022 after Baz Luhrmann gave him a sneak peek at his star-making turn as the King of Rock and Roll. 'I was mesmerised by his charisma. I was seduced. It was, in some ways, a gamble. But when we did the make-up test and the first day of shooting, I was moved to tears by what he brought to the screen. I was like, "Oh my god, it's 10 times better than I was expecting."'

With all due respect to Skarsgård and Dave Bautista, who returns as blunt instrument Glossu 'The Beast' Rabban, the Harkonnens don't exactly trade on their good looks, but Feyd-Rautha has a dangerous allure that makes him the 'rock star of the family' according to Villeneuve. 'He's the beautiful Baron nephew. A playboy. A very sexy, charismatic, psychotic killer,' Villeneuve grins. 'There's something erotic about it. Everybody needs to be moved by his beauty. And Austin was perfect for that.'

Rautha himself is seduced by Léa Seydoux's newcomer Lady Margot who, like any good Bene Gesserit, has her own plans within plans ('It was amazing to see her in full power,' smiles Butler), and is dispatched by Christopher Walken's ruthless Padishah Emperor Shaddam IV, and his scheming daughter Princess Irulan (Florence Pugh, see p40), to stop Paul before he can become a threat to the Golden Lion Throne. Rautha is also heir apparent to House Harkonnen following the Baron's near-fatal encounter with Duke Leto in *Part One*.

'He's weakened by the poisoning, and knows that he has to find a replacement,' says Skarsgård, who's far cheerier

Léa Seydoux joins the cast, playing Bene Gesserit Lady Margot

Stellan Skarsgård is back in the make-up chair as Baron Harkonnen

Dave Bautista is back as 'The Beast'

in person than his on-screen counterpart. 'The Baron, he almost falls in love with Feyd-Rautha. He's a wonderful killer. He adores him, in a way. But, of course, if he would get out of line, he wouldn't hesitate to kill him…' As with the first film Skarsgård spent hours in the make-up chair every morning to become the bulging Baron, a gruelling process for any actor. 'Of course, I really didn't want to put on that shit again. It really hurt!' the actor chuckles. 'But, in a way, it's worth it.' One silver lining this time: no nude scenes. 'The nakedness means two more hours in the chair. It cut it down to six hours for me.'

Studying Skarsgård's performance as the Baron in order to locate Feyd-Rautha's feral voice, Butler imagined the influence he must have exuded over Rautha in youth. 'There's a sense of growing up with the Baron, and seeing his power, and being envious of his power,' Butler explains. 'I mean that in the Shakespearean sense of when you may love somebody, but may want to kill them at the same time, and take the power. But you have to do that in a wise way, because otherwise it will be taken from you. The constant Machiavellian back-and-forth is definitely a part of their relationship.'

FIGHT CLUB

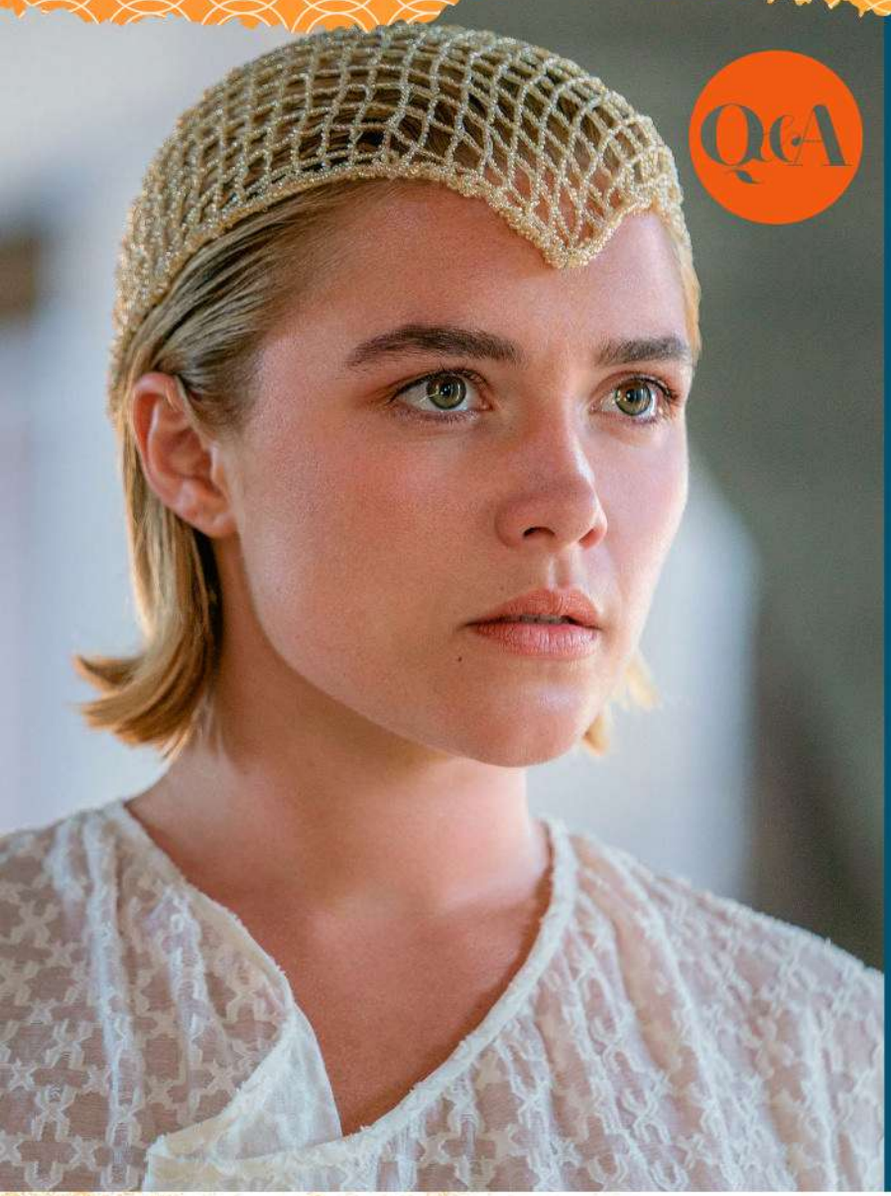
Butler's introduction to *Dune* was a testing one for the actor, in which Rautha fights captured Atreides soldiers in a gladiatorial arena – the Harkonnen idea of a birthday celebration, no less – on his homeworld of Giedi Prime. Villeneuve had a clear vision for the polluted planet from the script writing stage, one which ties neatly into *Dune*'s broader ecological themes. 'Giedi Prime is an industrial world,' Villeneuve explains. 'I loved the idea that in different worlds, the laws of physics could be different. Maybe there are some stars in the universe where the light doesn't reveal colours; it's the opposite, it kills colours. I thought a black-and-white world would fit with their primitive mentality.'

Rather than simply desaturating the image in post, an otherworldly effect was achieved by strapping infrared lenses to the large-format cameras. 'It wasn't something that was done in VFX; it was done as we were shooting,' notes Villeneuve, who captured 100% of *Part Two* in the expanded IMAX 1.43:1 aspect ratio, as opposed to just '35-40%' of *Part One*. 'I explained to the studio that: "We shoot it this way, and there's no way we can go back." They signed with their blood [laughs]. But it created a very powerful, eerie feeling that I love.'

'I was able to see playback of the infrared [as we were filming],' Butler recalls. 'I'd never seen anything like that before. It makes your eyes look like a shark. It's wild.' The result is undeniably striking, but the filming of the arena scene was challenging in other ways. 'That was the first sequence filmed for *Dune: Part Two*,' Butler notes. 'It was extremely hot in Budapest at that time – 110°F. We were filming in what was

"THE BARON, HE ALMOST FALLS IN LOVE WITH FEYD-RAUTHA. HE'S A WONDERFUL KILLER. HE ADORES HIM, IN A WAY" STELLAN SKARSGÅRD

Director Denis Villeneuve on set with Javier Bardem and Josh Brolin



Q&A

FIT FOR A PRINCESS

Florence Pugh is *Dune* royalty

How would you describe Princess Irulan?

I don't think I've played anyone quite like her before, partly because I've played a lot of gobby and opinionated women! She's someone that is constantly listening and constantly watching. She's learning in every single scene. She's constantly plotting, and that is probably one of the most exciting things about her – she's figuring out a future.

Irulan is a comparatively small part of the novel, how did you feel about that?

It so didn't matter. Last year, I just really wanted to be a part of great, epic movies. It didn't matter how big my role was. I got to do that with *Oppenheimer*, and I got to do that with *Dune*. When I chatted to Denis, he kept apologising, and saying, 'In this one, it's really not a big part. I won't be offended [if you say no].' I was like, 'I don't care! I just want to come and watch you work. This is a dream.'

What is Irulan's relationship to the Emperor?

Oh my god, I got to work with Christopher Walken. Their relationship is very beautiful. It's a father/daughter relationship like no other, because he's the Emperor, and he owns the world. He's a very intelligent leader that is training his child to be just as brilliant and just as smart as him. I'm not saying it's all rainbows. But you can see that there's love there.

Your costumes seem out of this world, even by *Dune*'s standards...

I love having relationships with the costume designers. They are more obsessed with your character than you are sometimes, which is thrilling. And then I get the role of Princess Irulan, and I'm like, 'Oh my god, yes. I'm going to be now wearing those crazy, amazing costumes.' I definitely had that with my chainmail dress outfit. It was so exciting to put on. But we'd go in at 5am. You have to put it on bare skin, but obviously it's metal and it had been in the warehouse all night. My goodness, it was cold. **JORDAN FARLEY**

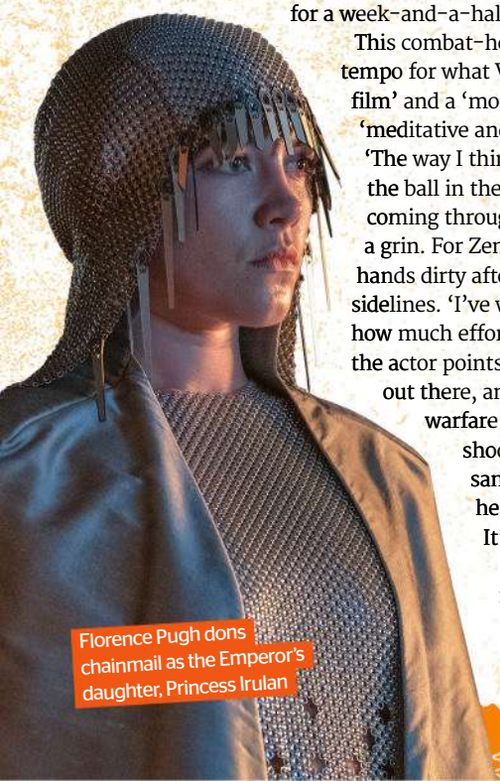
basically a grey box with 200ft walls and sand. So it created a microwave, essentially. There were people who passed out from heat stroke. But I was so grateful to start with that sequence because it was physical. You're not in your head. I was able to prepare for six months for that, and then go out there, and fight for a week-and-a-half.'

This combat-heavy start to the production set the tempo for what Villeneuve says is 'more of an action film' and a 'more muscular' movie compared to the 'meditative and contemplative' opening instalment. 'The way I think about it is, *Part One* was like tossing the ball in the air, and this one's the baseball bat coming through and cracking it,' Chalamet says with a grin. For Zendaya, it was an opportunity to get her hands dirty after years of eagerly observing from the sidelines. 'I've watched through many-a-*Spider-Man* how much effort goes into creating these sequences,' the actor points out. 'I was like, "Damn, I want to get out there, and kick some butt!" The trailers tease warfare on a planetary scale, with Fremen shooting down ornithopters from atop sandworms. 'When you see the battles here you go, "I haven't seen that before." It's crazy,' says an animated Bardem.

What sets the action in *Dune* apart from most blockbuster tentpoles (other than, you know, sandworms) is that every 'big set-piece has real lived-in stakes behind it' according to Chalamet. The perfect example is Paul's first worm-ride (see boxout p43), which is brought to the screen in jaw-droppingly visceral fashion in *Dune: Part Two*. The outrageously dangerous ritual is a rite of passage among the Fremen, and a turning point in Paul's journey. 'Beyond being an exciting sequence in the movie, it represents a coming of age,' says Chalamet. 'It's where Paul's supposed prophecy would fall flat, and it would mean his death if he can't rise to the occasion. So the stakes of that moment are huge, and the doing of it was thrilling. It was industrial fans blowing sand, and a slab of worm was built. It was an amazing experience.'

Envisioning exactly how a human is supposed to mount a skyscraper-sized beast in the open desert was one of the first problems Villeneuve tackled on *Part Two*. 'When you read the book your brain is connecting the dots, but what's the technique?' the director asks. 'I needed to show the logic of how to ride a worm, and the danger. But, at the same time, Paul needs to be good! To create that fine balance is fun because, as a filmmaker, I never had the chance to show the birth of a hero.'

Worm-riding is far from the only test Paul will face in *Dune: Part Two*, there's also Feyd-Rautha waiting at the end of a long and dangerous road for a trailer-teased crucial mano a mano fight. 'That was definitely one of those sequences that we gave a ton of attention to,' Butler says. 'Our lives are in the other's hands, in a way – we did a lot of work together.'



Florence Pugh dons chainmail as the Emperor's daughter, Princess Irulan

"IT WASN'T ENTIRELY LIKE SHE'S AT THE WILL OF WHO SHE'S IN LOVE WITH. I DID FEEL A PARTICULAR SENSE OF CARE FOR WHAT CHANI REPRESENTS"

ZENDAYA

Villeneuve and Ferguson discuss her attempt to blend in with the scenery

"FOR JESSICA, NO DECISION IS MADE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE HARSH – SOMETIMES LETHAL – CONSEQUENCES OF THAT CHOICE"
REBECCA FERGUSON

Gathering forces in the desert

'We started kali fight training independently in Los Angeles,' Chalamet adds. 'We went after it, man. We were super-motivated. It was inspiring [working with Austin]: how lasered-in he was, and how dark his character was. It really brought purpose to the mission that Paul goes on. That the universe is in better hands with him than with Feyd-Rautha.'

For their showdown, Paul and Rautha have one hell of an audience, with practically the entire top-billed cast of the film assembling in one huge room for the two-or-so weeks it took to shoot, even though many A-listers and legends were required to do little more than watch from the sidelines. 'That was really quite an exciting room to be in. Anywhere you looked, there was an unbelievable actor,' says Pugh, who Villeneuve cautions has limited screen time in *Part Two*, but would have a much larger role to play in any potential sequel. 'The immediate inspiration there is that everyone has shown up to tell this story,' adds Chalamet. 'And everyone is 100% prepared and committed to building the world of *Dune* for Denis Villeneuve.'

MUSIC MAESTRO

That commitment extended behind the camera to the heads of department, almost all of whom return for

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RIDE OR DIE

Production visual effects supervisor Paul Lambert on bringing worm-riding to the screen.

'The first Zoom call on *Dune: Part Two* was: "How the heck are we going to do the sandworms?" Denis came up with this amazing idea. They call a worm when they're on a big dune. The worm comes, and it goes for the thumper. It goes through the dune, and then the character falls from the dune onto the worm. There were multiple conversations as to how we were going to pull this off. It was a whole combination of different techniques.

'We got a tonne of sand in the desert and, in a controlled area, we were able to build the peak of a dune. And then we had three tubes which were being pulled by these crazy, industrial tractors. And as the stunt person is running it's all timed so that the tubes get pulled, the sand collapses, he falls down – and then, after that, [visual effects] take over, as we go into a dusty environment.

'We then built a partial worm on a gimbal. It was a lot of stunt-team work, but then Timothée also did it. They'd be holding the hooks on the worm, and we would bounce the gimbal. Greig [Fraser] wanted everything backlit, so we would rotate everything, chasing the sun to get that interactivity with the character as he's moving. And then we'd add additional digital sand and the surrounding dunes, bringing all of that into one cohesive image.' **JORDAN FARLEY**

Part Two following their fêted work on the first film, including cinematographer Greig Fraser, costume designer Jacqueline West, production visual effects supervisor Paul Lambert, editor Joe Walker and production designer Patrice Vermette, whose sets are described with enthusiastic reverence by the entire cast. 'These massive spaces are so mind-blowingly constructed… it really inspires a feeling of awe,' says Butler.

But few went as far as composer Hans Zimmer. Much like Villeneuve, Zimmer is a life-long fan of the book, and basically never stopped working after the first film was completed, writing 90 minutes of brand new music simply to get Villeneuve in the mood for writing *Part Two*'s screenplay.

'I remember at one point, he called me, and said, "Denis, listen to this. You're going to love this,"' Villeneuve recalls. 'I said, "Hans, it's absolutely fantastic music. I deeply love it. But we released the film six months ago!" He was still scoring non-stop. And he's doing the same right now, by the way. It's by far the best score I've had in my life, and in *Part Two* the score is even stronger than *Part One*. I can say that with confidence.'

Feyd-Rautha is the Baron's devoted nephew...

There's a reasonable chance that Zimmer is still writing *Dune* music as you read this, months after Villeneuve locked picture on *Part Two*, perhaps to get the filmmaker in the mood for writing *Part Three* – an adaptation of sequel novel *Dune Messiah*. Once again, nothing is promised, begging the question: will Villeneuve be 'at peace' if *Part Two* is the end of his time on Arrakis? 'I will say that there's something that's complete, that all of the elements are there,' Villeneuve nods. 'But I think the movie adaptation is more tragic than the book. There's something more heartbreaking. The way that *Part Two* ends… it would create a total balance and equilibrium to finish Paul's storyline in what we could say in *Part Three*.'

If the cast have discussed a third film with Villeneuve, they're keeping quiet for now. 'Denis is an artist, and doesn't like to share things until he's got it figured out. So whenever he's ready, we're all keenly ready to hear what his vision is,' says Zendaya. 'The idea excites me very much,' adds Chalamet, who has yet to receive the crucial greenlight text from Villeneuve. 'If the time and opportunity comes to complete the story with *Messiah*, I think we're all super-enthusiastic about that.' **JORDAN FARLEY**

DUNE: PART TWO OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 MARCH.

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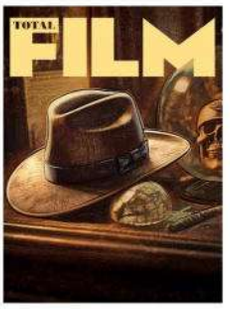

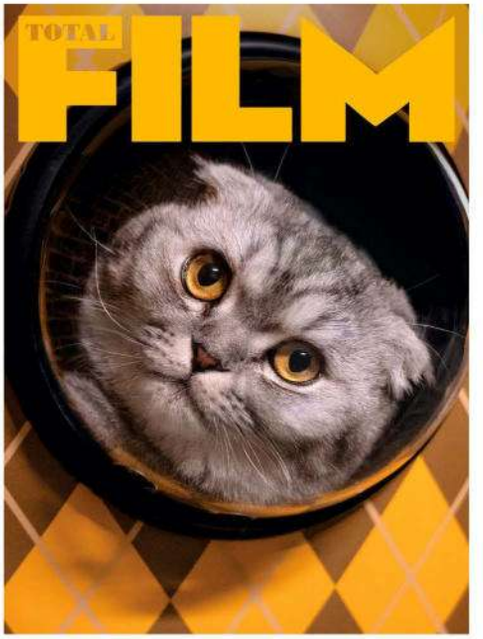

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JACK BLACK

MY LIFE IN PICTURES

Over the years he's made us laugh as rockers, animated critters and videogame avatars. As he prepares to go full Dragon Warrior again in the fourth Kung Fu Panda movie, **JACK BLACK** riffs on some of his biggest hits with *Total Film*.

WORDS KIM TAYLOR-FOSTER

PORTRAIT CHRIS FLOYD

CAMERA PRESS: CHRIS FLOYD

KUNG FU PANDA 4 (2024)

The DreamWorks franchise that began in 2008 gifted Black with one of his most enduring roles: kindly, kickass, black-and-white bear, Po.

'I love kung-fu cinema so this is the only real opportunity to explore that world for me. I've just had a blast. When I first got the offer, [former DreamWorks CEO] Jeffrey Katzenberg liked what I did in *School of Rock* and was like, "I just did *Shrek*, and things are kickin' ass, and I think you'd be great as this panda." At first, I was hesitant. I was like, "I don't know if I quite understand what the concept is." He showed me a rough drawing of Po animated to a scene from *High Fidelity*. I got it in that moment. I was like, "Yeah, let's do it." And it's been an incredible bucking bronco ride ever since. I guess it's just that combination that people love; they love martial arts and when you can mix comedy with that, it has that combustible sort of combination. Jackie Chan was able to do it really well for dozens of films. Stephen Chow did that to great effect with *Kung Fu Hustle* and *Shaolin Soccer*. I think it's the same kind of thing that resonates with a *Kung Fu Panda* audience. Do I want to do any more? It's not up to me. I could see them going, "Oh, now there's a bunch of baby pandas. It's *Kung Fu Pandaz* – with a 'Z'." But I'm always down to clown. You know I'm ready to party.'

JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE (2017)

Another videogame-flavoured franchise offered Black hilarious body-swap potential, playing a videogame avatar inhabited by a teen girl.

'We were shooting one scene in the Hawaiian underbrush and there were these centipedes. They're terrifying insects. These guys play for blood. Take a look at a close-up of a centipede's face. It looks like Satan. We were working late into the night and everyone was on edge about these centipedes. Then we heard someone on the crew yell out in pain. He was bitten by a goddamn centipede. But we had a lot of fun when we weren't running away from centipedes. Do you know who I hung out with the most when we weren't filming? Karen Gillan and Nick Jonas. We were the Three Musketeers. I didn't feel trepidation about the Robin Williams of it all. This felt like a very different direction. I didn't think anyone was gonna say, "Hey, how dare you touch that?" I was just psyched to hit the ground running on this insane jungle adventure inside of a game with my old pal, [director/producer] Jake Kasdan. We'd had so much fun on *Orange County*. Sometimes you hear about the cast, and you read the script and you go, "This just feels like it's gonna be dynamite."'

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THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE (2023)

Black voiced videogame reptilian baddie Bowser in the highest-grossing film of last year.

'I was very excited to play Bowser. It was a fun opportunity to play a villain. They're some of the coolest, juiciest roles – that I don't usually get to play. We really drilled down – that's pro talk for spending weeks and weeks experimenting with different voices – until the powers that be felt like we landed on something that was perfect. [Illumination founder] Chris Meledandri has a very keen eye for detail. And that was tough, to be honest. It was like, "Oh, man, they're not just gonna let me do whatever I want." When we did finally get to a place where everyone agreed, then it was off to the races. But we could have gone a few different ways. I was experimenting with a few different accents. There was a British guy in there. There was a Deep Southern guy in there. We landed on the final Bowser that's a little pinch of heavy metal God of Rock; a little pinch of professional wrestler; and a little pinch of fire-breathing dragon. They screened it for me a month before it hit theatres. I was like, "We've got a hit on our hands." I'm laughing and smiling the whole way through this movie. And then it came out and it got horrible reviews. I was like, "What movie did they see?" Luckily, the world didn't listen to Rotten Tomatoes, and it was one of the biggest hits of all time. It's a totally different experience to [upcoming videogame movie] *Minecraft*. They're both videogame related but in terms of approach, live action is a different ball of wax. I'm really excited to get back into the creative space with Jared Hess, the director. We worked together on *Nacho Libre* years ago. It's been fun jamming with Jared.'

TROPIC THUNDER (2008)

Alongside 'Frat Pack' stablemate Ben Stiller, Black went meta as a comedy actor working on a Vietnam movie that turns dangerous.

'The scenario was so outlandish and hilarious – this group of actors acting like soldiers and getting caught up in an actual super-dangerous military emergency – it was a no-brainer. Hard, though. Once again, we were in the terrifying jungles of Hawaii. Just hours of four-wheeling it to get to these difficult locations. But it was worth the mudslides, treacherous terrains and devilish centipedes. It was an incredible ensemble. Ben Stiller, who's a genius, and Robert Downey Jr., Tom Cruise, Matthew McConaughey… a veritable who's who of Hollywood. Tom Cruise was unrecognisable as Les Grossman. He was really channelling some angst, I think, about some studio executives that shall remain nameless. I just didn't know he had that gear in him. I guess he had done some comedy but not like this, with such broad strokes. And not such a character that he totally disappeared into. It does make you wonder when he is going to bust out and do some more comedy. If he does, he should let me know. I'll jump on board that choo-choo train.'

TENACIOUS D IN THE PICK OF DESTINY (2006)

The fictional fantasy origin story for Black and Kyle Gass' real-life rock duo.

'My baby. The only one that I wrote. The challenge was figuring out how to take the magic of our live act, our little comedy rock'n'roll fever dream, and create a narrative that could be brought to the silver screen. We took years just thinking, "What's it going to be?" We went through different writers, scenarios and stories, and nothing felt right. And then I realised: let's just tell the true story of our origins. We'll spruce it up, but at the core is an emotional truth. Even though when it first came out it was a box-office disaster, it ended up still being our proudest moment and the pinnacle of our creativity. Over the years, it's become a hit and it's actually made all its money back. You can tell the extent of this because when we perform all around the world, everyone knows every word of every song in that movie.'

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KING KONG (2005)

In Peter Jackson's epic remake, Black is the filmmaker out to make a monster movie on Skull Island.

'*The Lord of the Rings* was my favourite trilogy of all time. I worshipped Peter Jackson, and [collaborators] Fran [Walsh] and Philippa [Boyens]. When I got the call to be in *King Kong*, I just accepted. Before I read the script. The character itself, the filmmaker, is based on the 1933 film. There's nothing *School of Rock*-y about it. They just liked my performance in *School of Rock*. They liked my charisma, my flavours, and they thought that could be an exciting element to put into this story. They saw me in this world and I'm glad they did because it was one of the highlights of my life. When you're working with Peter Jackson and he's got something in his mind, I imagine it's kind of like Elon Musk when Elon's like, "I'm going to send a thousand satellites into space." No one's going to stop him and Peter was riding a wave of that kind of momentum off of *The Lord of the Rings*. He was like, "OK, so you guys fall down this treacherous ravine; now you're surrounded by flesh-eating insects and they're coming to eat you, so you have to defend yourself and swipe around like mad. And we're not going to have anything here now; you're just going to have to imagine it." No one would do it this way because it's just so expensive – where there's literally thousands of moving insects that they're going to have to do in post.'

SCHOOL OF ROCK (2003)

In the first of three collaborations with Richard Linklater, Black found a signature role as rocker-turned-reluctant-substitute teacher Dewey Finn.

'A lot of scenes in that movie are embedded in my mind forever. There was a day where I sang to the students and Rick Linklater, the director, was like, "I want to get this all in one take." There's something about that independent film spirit that he brought to the movie that made it special. You don't see a shot like that, where you shoot a whole scene with one take, with no coverage, no over-the-shoulder shots. Just a slow pull back on me just singing this one song from beginning to end. It felt like this is the [role] that's going to be on my tombstone. It was made for me – Mike White wrote that with me in mind. There's something different that happens when a really good writer crafts a character for you. It's bespoke; it fits you in a way that other projects don't. Mike also co-wrote *Nacho Libre*. I don't know why there has never been a *Nacho Libre* sequel but there's something great about a project when it is just a one and only. The one-offs.'

UNIVERSAL/DREAMWORKS FOR KUNG FU PANDA); ALAMY

HIGH FIDELITY (2000)

After regular TV and film work, Black broke out with a scene-stealing supporting turn in Stephen Frears' Nick Hornby adaptation.

'My friend, John Cusack, was like, "You would be perfect for this role, Barry, in *High Fidelity*." I was hesitant because I was like, I don't know if I want to make a movie about rock and roll, and someone who is a critic of rock and roll. I think it might hurt my rock and roll career. So, at first I passed and my agent said, "Are you fucking kidding me? Are you insane?" I was like, "You're right. I'm insane." It's Stephen Frears, for Christ's sake, who was one of my favourite directors. When it came time to finally sing at the end of the movie, I was like, "Holy shit, that's a lot of pressure." We did the first take and the vibe in the room was not electric. It wasn't the big grand finale it needed to be. [Frears] came out, livid. He was yelling at the entire room [adopts British accent]: "Everyone here has to be engaged in the performance. The music is blowing your mind. Now let's take it from the top and this time, you enjoy yourselves. OK, Jack, take it from the top. Jolly good." I was like, "Holy shit, he really was yelling at me." I took it as my fault they're not enjoying it, because I'm not rocking hard enough. He said, "Action" on take two, and I just uncorked it. And that was the take that they used in the movie. Thank God I was able to reach a reservoir. That was a big money ball for me.'

KUNG FU PANDA 4 OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 28 MARCH.

FRISKY BUSINESS

Margaret Qualley and Geraldine Viswanathan star as queer friends being chased by dumb male criminals in *Drive-Away Dolls*, a road movie/romantic comedy/crime caper by husband-and-wife team Ethan Coen and Tricia Cooke. *Total Film* hitches a ride with the directors and stars to talk dark laughs, dim crims and dildos...

WORDS JAMIE GRAHAM

Open-and-shut case: Colman Domingo as The Chief; below, Matt Damon as Senator Channel

than Coen and his wife Tricia Cooke are talking about having sex while other people are in the room. Not now, in their marriage, you understand – *Total Film* is not in the habit of prying into the intimate details of its interviewees' relationships. But back in the day, in their youth.

'Yes, I've certainly lived through something like that,' says Cooke with an expression that falls somewhere between a grin and a grimace. 'I had a roommate in college who liked to bring men home. We shared a room. You have to zone out and find a different place to be, intellectually.' Coen is smirking. 'I'm not gonna make it personal and tell you about… But yes, it's everyone's nightmare,' he nods. 'You don't want to hear other people's sex: "Oh my god. Let me crawl into a hole. Let me not be here."'

A lot of us have been there. The late teenage years and early 20s is, for many, a time of discovery, but it's also a time of financial low-to-no-income and shared rooms. College students will likely know all about having to put on headphones when an inebriated roommate crashes into the room in the gasping, grasping clutches of another.

'I've pretended to be asleep when I wasn't asleep,' laughs Margaret Qualley. 'You just try and sink into the bed. But I've never done the reverse!'

Now before you go thinking that your favourite magazine has lost the plot and just randomly started asking wildly inappropriate questions to famous people, it should be pointed out that *Drive-Away Dolls*, a crime caper by Coen and Cooke, is a riotous, sex-fuelled road movie that throws up just such a scenario. In it, queer BFFs Jamie (Qualley) and Marian (Geraldine Viswanathan) hit the highway from Philadelphia to Tallahassee. Naturally, there are bungling criminals on their tail – Ethan Coen and older brother Joel brought us *Miller's Crossing*, *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski* – but more on that later. For now, let's concentrate on the romantic-comedy aspect, as the uptight Marian finds herself sharing motel rooms with free-spirited Jamie, who's either pulling women and bringing them back, making out with a female soccer team or masturbating in the next bed.

'I've done a lot of movies about penises,' grins Viswanathan, whose *Cat Person* is about the horrors of dating, and whose breakthrough movie *Blockers* tracked three teenage girls trying to lose their virginity on prom night. 'Someone was like, "Oh, but Ethan Coen, that's more highbrow,"' she says of landing *Drive-Away Dolls*. 'I was like, "Actually no, there's a lot of dildos." I guess that's just my brand. It's not intentional, it's something I've just fallen into. And I don't know how to feel about that!'

Qualley, meanwhile, starred as a free-love hippy in Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time… in Hollywood*, in Claire Denis' sexually frank romantic thriller *Stars at Noon*, and in Yorgos Lanthimos' feminist Frankenstein *Poor Things*, which put the bonk into bonkers. Going at it hammer and tongs on screen is no biggie for her, and was made less daunting still by the way the shagging in *Drive-Away Dolls* is played for titters rather than titillation.

'I liked the way the humour is brought into the sexuality,' she says. 'Like that scene when Jamie's in bed with the dildo. It's just ridiculous! I've seen many a scene where you've just got some actress touching herself – I've done the scenes – but I've never seen an actress touching herself be the butt of the joke. I like this version of it. It's not so serious, it's not exploitative, it's just… funny.'

An infectious laugh that can only be described as goofy erupts out of her. 'It made it easier to play. It wasn't some kind of vulnerable thing. It's just funny.

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So ridiculous. I'm reaching towards something that's more in line with Chris Farley's physical humour than the typical masturbation scene for a woman.'

CRIMINAL PURSUIT

It was Cooke, who's been married to Coen for 34 years but identifies as queer, who came up with the title 'Drive-Away Dykes' some 20-odd years ago. Coen liked it, and together they wrote the script. Then put it in a drawer. Neither quite believed that they'd actually ever make it, and Ethan and Joel, of course, were doing their thing (which Cooke was a big part of – she's worked with them on the edit of several of their movies, though the brothers' screen credit always went to the pseudonymous Roderick Jaynes). And then it suddenly happened. Joel went solo to make 2021's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, and Ethan and Tricia opened that drawer.

'Oh shit' is how Cooke remembers the realisation that 'Drive-Away Dykes' – now retitled *Drive-Away Dolls* – was heading into production, while Ethan adds an 'Oh fuck' for good measure. It never gets any easier, he insists: 'When you get the train going, you have to run like a motherfucker to keep up with it.'

'I'VE DONE A LOT OF MOVIES ABOUT PENISES. I GUESS THAT'S JUST MY BRAND. IT'S NOT INTENTIONAL'
GERALDINE VISWANATHAN

Husband-and-wife team Ethan Coen and Tricia Cooke on set

Viswanathan and Qualley both auditioned… for the same part. 'They said to audition for whichever one you connect to more,' recalls Qualley, 'and I guess I saw myself as more of a Marian. And I sent Ethan an email because I'm such a huge fan. He responded, "I was hoping that you would audition for Jamie, but oh well." I was like, "What? No! I'll just audition for Jamie!" He was like, "No, an artist knows what they're best for." I was like, "I don't know anything, Ethan!"'

For the support roles, a roster of serious talent signed up. Beanie Feldstein is a hoot as a no-nonsense cop who Jamie breaks up with at the start of the movie – given her profession, you just know she'll come back into the action when the criminals enter the picture – and Matt Damon, who starred in the Coens' western *True Grit*, plays… well, let's keep that under wraps, and just say he's an important player in the twisty turny plot. Among the bad guys, meanwhile, are men of the moment Colman Domingo (*Rustin*, *The Color Purple*) and Pedro Pascal (*The Last of Us*, *The Mandalorian*).

Said bad guys come into play when they go to pick up their drive-away vehicle in order to transport an important package to Florida, only to be told that our heroines have already collected the car. It's a classic mix-up/twist of fate of the type that can be found in so many pulp crime novels or 40s and 50s film noirs. As M. Emmet Walsh's sleazy PI wheezily narrates at the start of the Coen brothers' debut, *Blood Simple*: 'An' the fact is, nothin' comes with a guarantee. Now I don't care if you're the Pope of Rome, President of the United States or Man of the Year, somethin' can all go wrong.' And so Jamie and Marian find their tricky love lives further complicated by huffing heavies who are after a Halliburton case in the trunk of the car. It contains… again, we'll keep that under wraps.

What makes it all such a delight is that Coen and Cooke don't take any of it too seriously. *Drive-Away Dolls* affectionately embraces its B-movie nature. If it was to be compared to a Coen brothers' movie, it's closer to the propulsive zaniness of *Raising Arizona* or the breezy silliness of *Burn After Reading* than the formal rigour and thematic weight of *No Country for Old Men*. The Coens, and Cooke, adore the syncopated snap of the crime tales of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain, and the brazen energy of the classic film noirs, which were often shot in two or three weeks, or even a few days. Likewise, the shoot of *Drive-Away Dolls* moved fast ('Ethan does no takes,' jokes Viswanathan. 'We had the world's shortest days on set. Ethan brings his crew from day dot, so there's this camaraderie and shorthand between departments') and the film is a little looser

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

What's in the case in *Drive-Away Dolls*? We do know it isn't the first movie to float such a question...

Kiss Me Deadly (1955)
Robert Aldrich's brutal, cynical noir features a lead box, its glowing contents kept a secret until the cataclysmic final scene. The box is a pivotal part of a mystery that's investigated by thuggish PI Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker), with the resolution proving a real downer for everyone involved. Oof.

Repo Man (1984)
The glowing trunk of the Chevy Malibu in Alex Cox's satire of America in the Reagan years is a nod to the 'great whatsit' in *Kiss Me Deadly*. 'What you got in the trunk?' asks a state trooper. He's vaporised when he takes a peek, only his boots left behind as the Chevy pulls away.

Pulp Fiction (1994)
The cinematic magpie that is Quentin Tarantino also gave us a container housing a mysterious glow. The briefcase coveted by crime lord Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) is a MacGuffin, of course – we never learn the truth. But the theories that it's Marsellus' soul or the diamonds from *Reservoir Dogs* are entertaining.

Seven (1995)
What's in the box, indeed? OK, the accepted answer is Gwynnie's head judging from the response of Brad Pitt's Detective Mills and the chilling words of Kevin Spacey's serial killer John Doe, but we never see it. Maybe it's just a weather forecast promising another week of heavy rain.

Ronin (1998)
Another case that everyone is scrambling after, from the IRA to the Russians. It's worth more than half-a-million dollars, but that's all we know... well, that and that having everyone frantically pursue it is a good thing for viewers, for *Ronin* features some of the best car chases in cinema.
JAMIE GRAHAM

and scrappier than the Coen brothers' movies. The B-side to a hit single, perhaps: recognisable but experimental.

Coen is discussing his love of noir pictures. 'They've got that sense of fun. They've got their own energy and the finer points can't interfere with the energy and don't contribute to the energy,' he muses before moving on to the authors of pulp fiction. 'The writers you mentioned, despite what they're talking about [being] pulpy stuff, they're great stylists, as great as any writers you can name me in the 20th century. That's good shit.'

'We want to make movies that don't take themselves too seriously,' chimes in Cooke. 'Movies that are just fun, or trashy, or raunchy. There are lots of serious movies out there…'

'And then there are good movies!' cuts in Ethan. A tongue-in-cheek marital spat ensues. 'There are lots of great serious movies,' says Cooke, to which Coen responds, 'I'm serious, there's something sublime when the movie is so much fun that it elevates to its own logic level. They're all taking the Halliburton case really seriously. That's as sublime as any serious movie. Better!'

So he prefers a cheap, quickie noir like *Detour* or *Murder by Contract* to the more sombre and grandiose crime pictures like *The Godfather* or *Once Upon a Time in America*?

'*The Godfather*'s great,' he concedes. 'I wouldn't denigrate those movies because I really like some of them.' Cooke nods, saying, 'I'm all for important films and even some moralising at times. All of the Kurosawa and Fellini [films] are great.' Coen's grinning again. 'We'll accept quality if you insist,' he says.

Well, they don't insist upon it from themselves. You might even say that *Drive-Away Dolls* is puerile. In the best possible way.

'Did I gravitate towards the puerile?' beams Coen. 'That's such a compliment, and I mean it. That's the kinda movie I want to see, right? I mean, fucking-A, man. That's what movies do, man. That's what they're good at.'

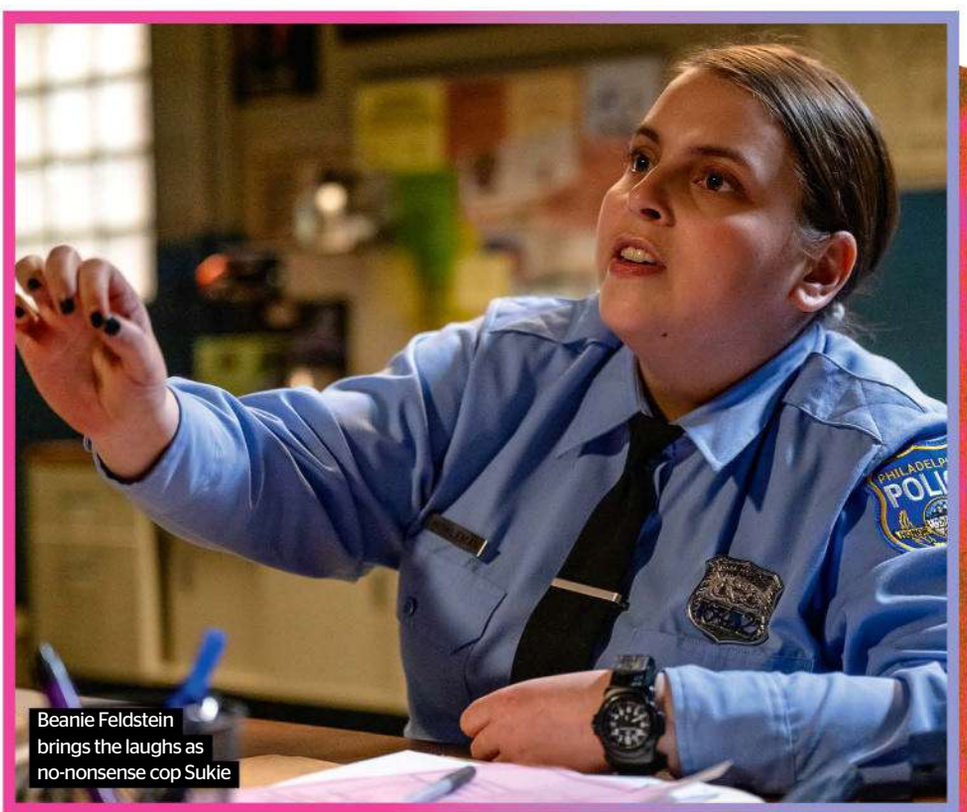
TALKING DIRTY

By all accounts, *Drive-Away Dolls* was as fun to make as it was to watch, with its two leads stressing what a laugh they had on set, and just how relaxed and amicable its creators were when it came to sharing their duties.

'We liked kind of everybody,' says Coen, bemusedly. 'It was almost disgustingly amicable.' He seems almost relieved when Cooke cuts in to point out, 'We had a couple of fights in the cutting room.' They grin at the memory.

So is there anything serious to take from this incredibly fun picture? There doesn't have to be, of course, and who's to say that making 'em laugh isn't the most serious business of all? But… is there? Perhaps the fact that it isn't hung up on representation with a capital R, that it doesn't feel the need to be politically correct and to make its queer heroines perfect role models but instead lets them fumble and mess up, as we all do in life (though naturally, it's the men who are dumb). Isn't imperfection the best example of all?

'There's not much political correctness in this movie!' chuckles Cooke. 'And I would just say that perfect is boring. It's not fun to watch anyone that does everything right. I certainly


Beanie Feldstein brings the laughs as no-nonsense cop Sukie

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On the run: Margaret Qualley as Jamie with Geraldine Viswanathan as Marian

'I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO PUT POSITIVE PORTRAITS OF SEX ON SCREEN'
TRICIA COOKE

don't do everything right. None of my friends do. I wouldn't even know how to write a character like that.'

'I totally agree,' says Coen. 'Perfect is boring. You write characters, you want to make them alive. That means imperfect.'

'In this day and age, it's a little harder to make movies where you have people mess up, especially if they're about a marginalised community, the queer community,' continues Cooke. 'But I'm queer and I don't know anyone who's perfect.'

She pauses, then changes lane to discuss another way in which the movie can be taken seriously. 'I think sex can be fun and it should be a positive thing,' she starts. 'The more we embrace it and don't fear sex… I think it's really important to put positive portraits of sex on screen, so it's not taboo and there's not as much shame around it. What do you think, Eth?'

He nods his approval and makes an 'ayuh' noise straight out of *Fargo*. Cooke continues, crediting Qualley and Viswanathan. 'They were game for anything, open to any wackadoodle thing we asked.'

'You don't see women that way, that much,' says Qualley, whose mum, Andie MacDowell, similarly challenged taboos when she starred in Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies and Videotape* back in 1989. *Drive-Away Dolls* feels particularly refreshing at a time when much of Hollywood's cinema is oddly asexual, its superheroes resembling action figures with no genitalia while nearly everyone else is seemingly wary of the subject in this age of #TimesUp and intimacy coaches.

'Yeah, true,' says Viswanathan. 'If you look at the history of film, there's been so many ebbs and flows in the freedom of sexuality. It's weird watching old movies and thinking, "This is way more progressive than the stuff we're making now." So in that sense, I'm really happy to be a part of these movies that challenge those expectations and push boundaries, because it's gotten…' She weighs her words. 'We're clutching our pearls a lot.'

Cooke earlier spoke of accepting a little moralising in films, and Viswanathan feels that *Drive-Away Dolls* comes with a message of its own. 'When I watch the movie, I think it's about the importance of getting laid,' she says. 'Like, "Yeah, Marian just needed to get laid."'

DRIVE-AWAY DOLLS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 15 MARCH.

HOW TO WRITE A SCREENPLAY ... ACCORDING TO DIABLO CODY

She's a screenwriting superstar who rocketed to fame on her very first project when she won an Oscar for *Juno*. Diablo Cody's latest film, *Lisa Frankenstein*, also features signatures like zeitgeisty dialogue, larger-than-life characters and an irresistible concept, and now she's breaking down her process for *Total Film*.

WORDS MATT MAYTUM

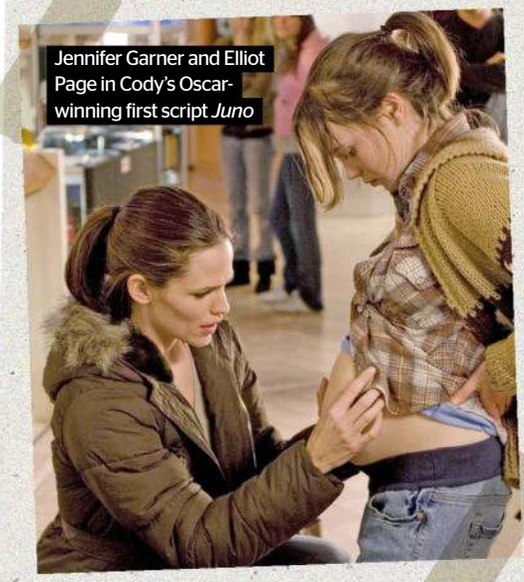
'I love the process of being able to write something, and watch it magically become a film,' beams Diablo Cody. 'Writing is instant gratification. If I want to write a scene in a blizzard, I can do that in 15 minutes. Setting up that blizzard [on a film set], it's like, "Guys, this is crazy. Are we sure this is worth it?"' she laughs.

Chatting to Diablo Cody – the Academy Award-winning screenwriter behind *Juno*, *Jennifer's Body*, *Young Adult*, *Ricky and the Flash* and *Tully* – is as funny, refreshing and illuminating as watching a film based on one of her scripts. It's December 2023, and she's talking *Total Film* through her writing methodology ahead of the release of her latest project, *Lisa Frankenstein*. Directed by first-time filmmaker Zelda Williams, it's like an 80s teen romcom, only here the romance is between a girl (Kathryn Newton) and a reanimated corpse (Cole Sprouse). With a knack for witty phrasing ('If I'm working on a project, and I'm being paid to do it, as far as I'm concerned, they're renting my brain, and they may use it however they care to'), Cody is also self-deprecating and down to earth, which you might not expect from someone who bagged an Oscar and BAFTA for their first ever screenwriting gig.

Having also worked in TV and on Broadway, Cody had been itching to write another feature. 'I admit, I was thinking to myself, "You've got to write another feature. It's been too long,"' she says of *Lisa Frankenstein*. 'But it felt organic. It usually does. I can't force myself to write anything, sadly.' Here, she tells *TF* her no-nonsense advice for how she puts together a screenplay...

Charlize Theron (here with Asher Miles Fallica) plays a struggling mother in Cody's 2018 film *Tully*

'IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND PEOPLE, YOU CAN'T WRITE'



Jennifer Garner and Elliot Page in Cody's Oscar-winning first script *Juno*

ON THE OUTLINE

'Typically I have a very standard process, and it has evolved over the years, mainly due to the constraints of the industry. I am not naturally inclined to outline a screenplay before I write it, but the majority of the studio jobs that I take require an outline, because they want to know what they're paying for. And I have to say, I do think those suits might be on to something, because it is actually a really helpful step. Having your story beats in front of you, you are going to have a better script. Just do it.

'*Lisa Frankenstein* was a very different process. I might even say it was unprecedented. I wrote that screenplay in March and April of 2020. I was in a really strange headspace. We weren't going anywhere at that point [due to COVID-19]. I think everyone was teetering on the brink of sanity. I didn't even know if we were living through the apocalypse, so I certainly wasn't writing with any commercial mindset. I was just writing for my own gratification and my own sanity. This is, in some ways, the most pure thing I've written since I was very young.'

STARTING POINT

'[A screenplay idea] usually starts, oddly enough, with a scene. I imagine an interaction in my mind that is interesting to me, and then I think, "OK, what context would that appear in?" I kind of write the movie around it. That was how I wrote *Juno*. I was just imagining how awkward and interesting it would be for this pregnant teenage girl to show up at the well-appointed, upper-middle-class home of two adults that wanted to adopt her unborn baby. What would that conversation be like?

'With *Lisa Frankenstein*, for years I had wanted to write a movie about someone who comes back from the dead. [It's] a theme that is resonant for a lot of people, because we kind of reinvent ourselves a lot over the course of a lifetime. I wanted to write this love story about a teenage girl and a corpse that would allow her to access her own grief, on her own timeline, because the living people around her aren't going to let her have that.

'Everything that I write ultimately ends up being about transformation in some way – whether it's about a girl turning into a cannibal demon, or a pregnant teenager, or a corpse who is becoming a real boy through the power of love and revenge.'

OBSERVE AND REPORT

'I'm a journalist by nature. My blog was totally observational. I was working in a strip club, and I was observing the interactions that I saw on a daily basis, which were fascinating. I was also, around that time, working for the local paper. Those skills were absolutely transferable to screenwriting. Because if you don't understand people, you can't do it. Observing people, their mannerisms, their dialects – I've always loved that stuff. And I've always written. I'd just never thought of screenwriting as the [format] that I'd wind up in.

'Sometimes in this business, I do meet people [and] I can tell that their experience is limited, in that they grew up very sheltered and very privileged, because I think that hobbles you as a writer.

'You have to live. At the very least, you should be keeping a diary. For me, personally, that was more helpful to me than any book I could have read, or any course I could have taken. I'm on TikTok every day, because I need to know how to write people that are under 30 [laughs].'

BACKGROUND READING

'[After being commissioned to write my first screenplay] I went to the bookstore and bought screenplays: *Ghost World*. *American Beauty*. Those were movies that I enjoyed. Reading them was helpful, because I was at least able to see, like, "OK, this is how it should look." I watched movies. I already had a sense of act structure because I'd written a lot of fiction, so that part kind of came naturally to me.

'I didn't read any books about how to write a screenplay, though. I will eventually because I'm curious, and someday I would love to teach, so I'm sure I'm going to need it on the syllabus.

'When I was younger, I [worried reading those books might mess with my process], and now I'm like: I've written how many screenplays in my own style? It wouldn't kill me to pick up some technique from a book [laughs]. Maybe I should try it. Maybe I should read one of those books, and write a script according to the rules. It could be the best thing I've ever written.'

WRITING RITUALS

'I'm imagining a life where I have the luxury of [having a strict writing routine]. I'm picturing myself at a pristine desk, and starting at a precise time each day. I can't

STUDIOCANAL, ALAMY

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do that. I kept having kids. I have three. They're a little bit older now. They're actually all downstairs, unsupervised, while I'm [doing this interview]. My laptop is right here, and I will probably pick it up, and continue writing on this beanbag surrounded by trash [after this].

'For people who have made different life choices, it's not necessary. I have had to teach myself to write in any situation at any time when I get a chance. I grab moments throughout the day. I grab moments before bed. But I don't get those big, luxurious, unbroken blocks of time that I once did.

'My one rule I have is, I have to work every day. I definitely work in bursts. I will have a day when I can crank out 20 pages, which is probably my absolute max, and I have to be under the gun for that [laughs]. And I might have a day where I write two.'

TUNING THE DIALOGUE

'I read all the dialogue [in my scripts] aloud, and do the scenes, and play the characters. It's really funny if I'm playing somebody's Appalachian grandmother, which I did recently in one of my scripts. And I'm a terrible actor. So I'm sure it's a sight to behold. But I have to read it out loud as I write it. I can't hear it otherwise. I've always done that. It's fun to read it with other people, too, and put on a little play.

'It's hard not to [squirrel away dialogue that you hear in real life]. People are so funny. I've been writing a project about competitive cheerleading. Observing younger people on TikTok, and the way that they communicate with each other, has been really educational.

'I try to expose myself to as many people and ages as I can, and I try to get out of the bubble as often as I can. It gets harder as I get older. I can't just say, "Oh, I'm going to be a stripper for a year now because it might be interesting." I'm definitely a little more tethered than I was. I can still take a trip.'

'YOU HAVE TO WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW. IT HAS TO BE PERSONAL, OR IT'S NOT GOING TO BE GOOD'

GENERATING IDEAS

'My Notes app goes crazy; I'm always writing [potential ideas] down. It's funny, though, because now it's like I'm constantly having to generate new material. My first few screenplays, I always say that they were almost a treasury of things I wanted to say. I had such a backlog, and now I don't [laughs]. I've used it all. I better keep paying attention.

'Writer's block is real. I can't stand it when people say, "It's your lack of discipline. You've got to fight through it." Sometimes there's nothing there, and it puts me into a panic every time. I think, "This is it. My career is over. I can't write any more." And then something happens, and I feel inspired again.

'I wish I knew what triggers inspiration or a visit from the muse. But I don't know, and it sucks. If you gave me a job, and you said, "You need to go outside and plant 100 tulips every day" – I know I can do that. With writing, if you tell me I have to write 10 pages tomorrow, I actually don't know if I can do it [laughs]. It's not concrete. Honestly, it's a lot of mental stress. But it's also fun. The days when it's fun, it's like, "I can't believe that this is my profession. I can't believe I'm getting paid to tell this story."'

ESSENTIAL ADVICE

'You need to put any commercial concerns aside, and write something that resonates with you. You have to write what you know. It has to be personal, or it's not going to be good. And the second thing I would say is, you have to take advantage of technology.

'I guess I'm a romantic, but I always say: the greatest screenplay you write is going to be the one that really comes from your heart. I just can't imagine a young person having a cynical outlook like, "I heard in Hollywood they're looking for more four-quadrant movies aimed towards women because *Barbie* was so successful, so I'm going to sit down and brainstorm those ideas." That makes me kind of sad. *Barbie* was amazing because it was personal to Greta Gerwig, and you have to find that story, too.'

Cole Sprouse and Kathryn Newton in the upcoming *Lisa Frankenstein*

LISA FRANKENSTEIN OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 1 MARCH.

& Marty me

WESLEY MANN, AUGUST

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Thelma Schoonmaker has edited every Martin Scorsese movie since 1980's Raging Bull. The three-time Oscar winner tells *Total Film* all about their legendary relationship, and why movies like GoodFellas, The Departed and Killers of the Flower Moon are a cut above...

WORDS **JAMIE GRAHAM**

What, exactly, does a film editor do? Ask the average person on the street to, ahem, assemble an answer, and they're likely to struggle. While filmmaking is the blending together of several established art forms – literature (script), painting and photography (cinematography), music (score) and theatre (acting, production design, costume) – the art of cutting is unique to cinema.

'It's mysterious,' nods Thelma Schoonmaker, who is perhaps the only editor who's not also a director that the average person on the street might have heard of. Her work with filmmaker Martin Scorsese, and the eight Oscar nominations that it's garnered, have made her something of a legend. 'I must say it's hard [to explain it]. You start one way, and everything is long, then you screen to friends, discuss. We do many screenings, many rough cuts. You'd have to be there to see why things are changing because they change gradually. But basically, what I say is, "Look, they shoot the film, then I get it. They might shoot a wide shot, a medium shot and a close-up, and one of my jobs is: should we be on a wide shot, medium or a close-up for this line?"'

Editing is not simply about taking a four-hour cut of a film and chiselling it down to an audience-friendly two hours. It's about providing the visual language of the movie and the punctuation; style and rhythm. This, in turn, contributes significantly to the tone and emotion of the picture. Naturally, then, it's something that Schoonmaker and Scorsese do together.

'Completely,' Schoonmaker smiles, her lunchtime sandwich sitting on the table before her at the British Film Institute. It's October: the BFI's Cinema Unbound season, dedicated to the films of Schoonmaker's late husband, Michael Powell, and his creative partner, Emeric Pressburger, will be bringing the glories of *A Matter of Life and Death*, *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes* and many more to the BFI Southbank and cinemas UK-wide for the next two-and-a-half months. What's more, Schoonmaker and Scorsese, via The Film Foundation in conjunction with the BFI National Archive and StudioCanal, have overseen a 4K restoration of Powell's seminal 1960 serial-killer movie, *Peeping Tom*.

But back to cutting with Marty. 'Everyone thinks I'm doing the editing, but we do it all together,' she explains. 'He's a great editor and he taught me everything I know. I get way too much credit. I really do. It's upsetting. He loves editing – it's his favourite part of filmmaking. We share it, and I love that. He had very bad experiences with editors in Hollywood. They were just not willing...' She sighs. 'Ego battles. I think he feels he can trust me to do what's right for the movie.'

'We share the editing, and I love that. I think he feels he can trust me to do what's right for the movie'

THE SPLICE OF LIFE

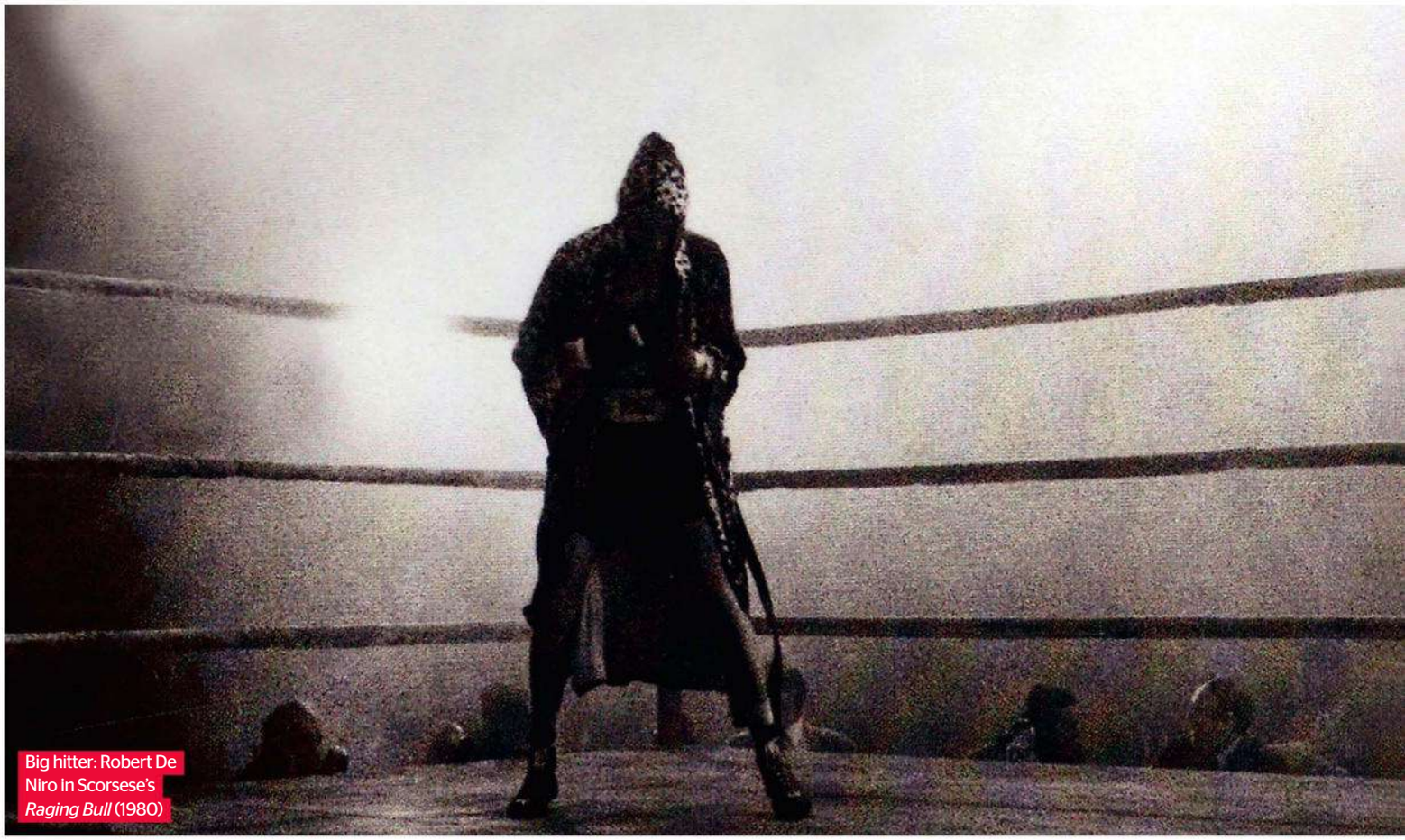
Born in January 1940 to American parents in Algiers, Algeria, Schoonmaker was evacuated with her family after the fall of France in World War Two. Her childhood was spent mainly on the Dutch-Caribbean island of Aruba, with time in Portugal, and she settled in America in 1955, attending Cornell University to study political science and Russian language. She graduated in 1961.

It was while attending a graduate course on primitive art at Columbia University that she spotted an advertisement in *The New York Times* to train as an assistant editor. The life-changing meet with a young Scorsese, meanwhile, came when she attended a six-week course in filmmaking at New York University, and used her editing skills to help salvage his short film *What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* after a previous editor had butchered the negative. Schoonmaker would go on to cut Scorsese's 1967 feature debut, *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, and together they, and four others, worked on the edit of 1970 music epic *Woodstock* – the first documentary to receive a Best Film Editing Oscar nomination, which went to Schoonmaker alone.

A union dispute with the Motion Picture Editors Guild prevented Schoonmaker from cutting movies in the 1970s (though she made an uncredited contribution to Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*), but from *Raging Bull* on, it's been all systems go. Of course, it didn't hurt that the no-punches-pulled editing of Scorsese's Jake LaMotta boxing biopic won the Oscar in 1981.

'I couldn't believe Marty didn't win that night,' says Schoonmaker, referring both to the fact that they cut the picture together, with Scorsese acting as mentor, and also that the film lost out to Robert Redford's *Ordinary People* in the Best Picture and Best Director categories. 'It was one of the saddest nights of my life. I just couldn't believe it. I wanted to give him my Oscar. I learned so much on *Raging Bull*. Marty was teaching me constantly. And the brilliant camerawork, the changing of speeds, the cutting... it's just phenomenal.'

Raging Bull failed at the box office, and while it received eight Oscar nominations (winning



Big hitter: Robert De Niro in Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980)

two) and various awards from critics' bodies, Schoonmaker insists that it wasn't truly appreciated for another 10 years, when it became a contender in Best Movie of All Time polls. It's a pattern she's since seen repeated again and again, with appreciation being in particularly short supply from the film studios.

'It happened continuously with Marty's movies,' she stresses. 'It's only the last 10 years or so that he's been acknowledged as the great director he is. Believe me, we had to fight tooth and nail [on] every one of those films to keep it being changed by the studio. And Marty would burn the film rather than give it up. We would win, but it would be a long, hard battle. Marty really struggled being a ground-breaker. I mean, *Mean Streets* was such a stunning change in so many ways. But being a ground-breaker in Hollywood was really, really hard for him. He had a terrible time.'

EDITED HIGHLIGHTS

What's remarkable is how Scorsese and Schoonmaker, at the ages of 81 and 84 respectively, have both kept their fire. Most filmmakers lose their mojo in the twilight years of their career, or burn out altogether, perhaps because there are only so many fights you can survive. And yet Scorsese and Schoonmaker just keep on keeping on, their astonishing list of credits including *The King of Comedy*, *After Hours*, *The Color of Money*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *GoodFellas*, *Cape Fear*, *Casino*, *The Age of Innocence*, *The Aviator*, *The Departed*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *Silence* and *The Irishman*. Schoonmaker points out that part of the secret is that they never repeat themselves, saying, 'Each one is a wonderful new challenge. *Killers* [*of the Flower Moon*] was very challenging. It's very unusual. We didn't underestimate the audience.'

> 'Editing *GoodFellas* was like a horse I was riding. It knew where it was going'

Schoonmaker receives her award for *Raging Bull* at the 1981 Oscars

She also points out that they like to push boundaries. The pyrotechnic style of *GoodFellas*, for example, was Scorsese's response to the rise of the generation of MTV directors. '*GoodFellas* is so entertaining,' she gasps. 'Every scene! [Nicholas] Pileggi had written the book, *Wiseguy*, and Marty knew so much about the Mafia that it was a great meeting of minds. That script was… phew! We didn't have to change anything. It was there.' When it came to editing the footage, 'It was like a horse I was riding. It knew where it was going.'

Schoonmaker's explosive cutting was Oscar nominated and, in 2012, *GoodFellas* was rated the 15th best-edited movie of all time by the Motion Picture Editors Guild – *Raging Bull* was No 1. She's proud of the accolades but adds, 'I do notice that the things I've gotten nominations for tend to be more active… action. Like *Raging Bull*, *The Departed*. Things like *Silence* are not…' She trails off. 'I do think there are certain characteristics of movies that win Oscars.'

But what about surviving those battles with the suits? How do they do it? 'You can get worn down,' she attests. 'Marty has a way of dealing with studio people that is very good. He doesn't get angry with them – Michael [Powell] would, he'd get angry and storm out the room – but Marty never does that. He finds a way to try and open the mind, if possible, by saying things like, "That's a good idea,

ALAMY, GETTY

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but I couldn't make that movie." In a nice way so no one gets insulted. He's very skilful at that. Michael wasn't, because, I think, of that long, wonderful period with Rank when no one paid any attention and they made masterpiece after masterpiece.'

It all changed for Powell with the release of *Peeping Tom*, about a young man, a focus puller at a British film studio, who films women as he kills them with a blade on the end of his camera's tripod. Critics labelled it 'sick' and 'beastly', most likely because they left the theatre feeling so uncomfortable: *Peeping Tom* implicates the viewer in the killer's voyeurism, and elicits audience sympathy for the monster by showing how he was tormented as a child by his psychologist father who specialised in the subject of fear. The film was yanked from theatres. And Powell, one of the greatest filmmakers, found his career effectively terminated.

Scorsese was one of the key figures behind *Peeping Tom*'s re-release in 1980, which began its reappraisal. Today it's rightly regarded as a masterpiece, and a fascinating companion piece to Hitchcock's *Psycho*: both released in 1960, they birthed the modern horror movie. It was also Scorsese who introduced Schoonmaker to Powell. They married in 1984; Powell died in 1990, aged 84.

'When Michael met Marty for the first time, he said, "It's a miracle! This man knows every movie I ever made and wants to know how did I do every shot?"' beams Schoonmaker. 'He was thrilled. He had a very happy end of his life.'

Lily Gladstone and Leonardo DiCaprio in 2023's *Killers of the Flower Moon*

Powell spent 30 frustrating years trying to find funding for the many movie ideas he had after *Peeping Tom*. How he'd delight to see that the pilloried film now has a gorgeous 4K restoration, its scratches erased and its lurid hues revived. To oversee the restoration, Scorsese and Schoonmaker were required to watch the film again and again until they knew every line.

'Marty kept shouting, "LOOK AT THE FILMMAKING!"' says Schoonmaker. It's no surprise, really – Scorsese has before gone on record saying you can learn everything there is to know about filmmaking from Fellini's *8½* and *Peeping Tom*. Schoonmaker immediately points out a key overlap between her late husband's movie and Scorsese's pictures: 'It's so stunning the way you feel for this man who's been tortured by his father and can't help what he's doing. Because Scorsese investigates that same area – they're never heroes or villains in his movies, they're something in between.'

She at last reaches for her sandwich and offers a final thought on Marty. 'We're more collaborators now than we were then. I was learning for a long time. So he gave me the best job in the world and the best husband in the world.'

PEEPING TOM IS NOW AVAILABLE ON SPECIAL EDITION 4K UHD, BLU-RAY AND DVD.

Karlheinz Böhm and Anna Massey in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, 1960

ALAMY, STUDIOCANAL

INTERVIEW **JAMIE GRAHAM**

‘I FEEL LIKE I’VE MADE A NICHE OUT OF FALLEN WOMEN. THE ANTI-LADY IS WHAT I’VE BEEN DRAWN TO...’

JESSIE BUCKLEY

Catapulting to fame over the last five years, instinctive Irish actor Jessie Buckley has wowed in films (*Wild Rose*, *I’m Thinking of Ending Things*, *Men*) and TV (*Chernobyl*, *Fargo* S4). She was Oscar-nominated for *The Lost Daughter*, won a Laurence Olivier award for *Cabaret* and now she’s spewing wild profanities at Olivia Colman in hilarious period comedy *Wicked Little Letters*...

PORTRAITS **SEBASTIAN KIM**

SEBASTIAN KIM / AUGUST

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Jessie Buckley is telling *Total Film* to fuck off. 'You're a fucking eejit,' she spits.

Thankfully, the outburst is prompted. In the 34-year-old actor's latest film, *Wicked Little Letters*, Buckley plays Rose Gooding, a rowdy Irish migrant living in the quaint English seaside town of 1920s Littlehampton. Rose, a single mum, makes eyebrows soar and curtains twitch with her foul mouth and boisterous behaviour, so is naturally the prime suspect when her pious neighbour, Edith Swan (Olivia Colman), receives anonymous letters addressing her as a 'fucking old bag of shit' and worse. The constant stream of inventive invective is hilarious, and attains a certain musicality when delivered in Buckley's native brogue.

'It's so delicious,' she agrees when *TF* apologises for embracing stereotypes but suggests that the Irish make an artform of cursing. So what's her own favourite swear? 'I mean, "fuck off" is pretty good,' she grins, and it indeed sounds great when delivered with the oomph she musters. '"Eejit" is such a great word. It isn't that bad but it makes me laugh. "You're a fucking eejit." What is that? It's like something a leprechaun would say!'

As amusing as the super-sweary *Wicked Little Letters* is, it sure as fuck has something serious to say. Class and fear of the outsider come under the microscope. But most of all, words like 'decorum' and 'moral rectitude' are bandied about by male characters who make it clear that only 'ladylike' behaviour will suffice. Rose, of course, is having none of it, and not even an impending court case and the threat of prison can quash her spirit.

It's a theme that has run through much of Buckley's stellar work since she turned heads in the 2017 feature, *Beast*. Before then, she'd done Shakespeare on stage and Tom Harper's *War & Peace* miniseries, but was primarily known for coming runner-up in *I'd Do Anything*, the BBC talent series geared towards finding a Nancy for the 2009 West End revival of *Oliver!*. With *Beast*, however, Buckley announced herself as a startling film talent, her Moll busting loose of the strictures of an oppressive family when she falls for Johnny Flynn's murder suspect, Pascal. In *Wild Rose*, she was a Glaswegian mother determined to hold on to her dream of becoming a country star in Nashville. Charlie Kaufman's mind-melting *I'm Thinking of Ending Things* saw her play Young Woman, who begins to question her relationship, herself and the world. In *The Lost Daughter*, meanwhile, for which Buckley received an Oscar nomination, she essayed a younger version of Olivia Colman's divorced professor Leda, at a time when domestic responsibilities threaten to stymie her thrusting intellect.

Dreaming of Nashville in *Wild Rose*

Again and again Buckley has delivered riveting portrayals of complicated women who refuse to be boxed. She has a knack for picking quality projects – see also Alex Garland's folk-horror *Men*, Sarah Polley's award-winner *Women Talking* and sci-fi romance *Fingernails*, plus TV shows *Chernobyl* and *Fargo* S4, and her Laurence Olivier Award-winning turn as Sally Bowles in the 2021 rendition of *Cabaret*. She also released an album with former Suede guitarist Bernard Butler in 2022, entitled *For All Our Days That Tear the Heart*. It was shortlisted for the Mercury Prize.

'I love all of it,' she laughs, stressing her plans to keep switching it up between film, TV, theatre and, occasionally, music. 'I'm a piggy!'

You must get so many offers now. Why did *Wicked Little Letters* leap out?
Well, firstly it was Olivia [Colman]. We did *The Lost Daughter* together, but we'd never actually worked together. We just get on. I love her to bits. She's become such a good friend. She sent me a text and was like, 'Do you want to do a job together? Can I send you something?' So I was like, 'Yeah, send me *Baa Baa Black Sheep*' [laughs]. And then I read it. It was just so funny. I'd done quite a lot of dark material for a while, and I just wanted to go have fun, and be really naughty. And the best person to be naughty with is Olivia Colman!

Had you met before *The Lost Daughter*?
We first met at Latitude Festival. We ended up doing karaoke until way too early in the morning. I think she kindly suggested me for *The Lost Daughter*, which is a mad, amazing thing. I did all my stuff first, in the first two weeks. And then she came and did her stuff. But we had a five-day overlap.

Doing karaoke with you is a terrifying proposition. She must be fearless!
No, I'm shit at karaoke! I'm always, in the middle, like, 'This is too slow. I've lost the crowd. I should have had that other glass of red wine…' And you're singing Adele or Amy Winehouse if it's at 5am. It's always sad [laughs].

In *Wicked Little Letters*, Rose refuses to conform to society's norms…
Oh, yeah! I mean, I feel like I've made a niche out of fallen women – the anti-lady is what I've been drawn to. The women that I love in my life, they're not that. They've got brilliant minds, and they have so much to say, and so much space to stake. It isn't just being put into a parlour room and being told, 'Be a good girl.'

STUDIOCANAL

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Buckley (with Olivia Colman) as the free-spirited Rose in *Wicked Little Letters*

The good girls that I've known in my life are the ones that have ended up behaving the worst [laughs]. So, yeah, Rose was so free and so fun. As a single mother to a daughter, she has utter commitment to teach her daughter to *live*. I think she says that to her daughter: 'Don't let them fuck you up.'

Growing up, did you ever have those stultifying expectations thrust upon you?
Definitely, yeah. It's impossible not to. You get it in all shapes and sizes. In my experience, it's always made me very sad, and I don't think it's very honest. Even with *The Lost Daughter*, sometimes that character, that mother, Leda… it's difficult for people. I've had other women say, 'Was that really hard, to play someone so unlikeable?' And I was like, 'Wow, that's so interesting.' There are so many things that we kind of nip each other about what we expect a perfect mother to be, or what the trajectory of that is. If you're a single mother, or have an affair, or want something more in your life, God forbid.

'BEING ABLE TO CURSE IN MY OWN ACCENT WAS EXTRA DELIGHTFUL'

Was it liberating to use your own accent for Rose?
It was so nice! I did it with *Romeo & Juliet* and Alex Garland's *Men* as well. But I love accents. Sometimes it's quite scary doing it in your own [voice], because you've got nothing to hide behind [laughs]. Actors, we quite like putting things on, often, and finding nuances in somebody else that you can live in or whatever. But I think that being able to curse in my own accent was extra delightful. I've been doing it my whole life. I've definitely heard, 'Just be more of a lady, Jessie!'

Did you have a favourite curse in the film? Everyone in the cinema howled at 'fucking Jesus shat on the cross'…
Oh, did they? That's good. Rose doesn't even notice that she's putting them out there. It's just like drinking a cup of tea. I remember when we did that one, one of the producers came in, and he was like, 'Do you think that's a bit too much?' Thea [Sharrock, director] was like, 'No, it's great.' When Olivia curses at the end, it's so glorious. The first time she did it, all the extras and everybody couldn't keep it in.

It's always more funny when it's unexpected…
[Scrabbles for phone] I don't know if I still have it… My mum was over in my house at the end of the shoot, and we all got cups. And on the cup was one of the swears. My mum, she was just having a cup of tea at nine o'clock in the morning, and then she started wetting herself. I was like, 'What's so funny?' She went, 'Fuck off you old, shrivelled, pasty, fucking piss-bastard' or something like that. [Shows photo of mum with cup]. My mum's as good as gold. I'd love if all the most pious women in Britain started reading out curse words – all the grannies. Wouldn't it be so great?

As you touched on earlier, your characters refuse to be fettered. Do you consciously gravitate towards these roles, or are they simply the most interesting?
It's not conscious, but I definitely love it when I read it. I mean, you go through different things where you're like, 'I want to explore that.' *Men* and *Women Talking* were quite an interesting conversation for me, because I thought, 'I want to put myself in two quite heightened places, having a similar but different conversation. I'm curious about what

that might feel like.' I guess I need some sort of emancipation in my work. I'm a bit scared of telling a story of a woman who's just a victim in her world, because I don't know what that offers.

Last time we spoke, you said you want to put out good examples to your younger sisters.
I don't know if I set an example any more [laughs]. I think I've sailed that ship! I think about all women. And I also think about men, and the relationships I want us to all be in with each other, which is not being smaller or scared of certain aspects of ourselves. What if we both took the space that we're most scared to stake? I don't even know what that is, but let's think about it, you know? What we have – the parlour rooms, or the uber-man [mimes being macho] – it doesn't work. I love men, and I love women, and I love our relationships together. I just feel like… I don't know if I can set an example; I can only really do it for myself. If something gets shifted, great. And if it doesn't, then I'll try again.

You've worked with a fair few female filmmakers. Is that something you seek out?
I haven't made a point of it, no. But I love it. You've got to feel something from the script, and if something gets your juices going, whether it's a man or a woman directing that, then brilliant. You really want to feel like you're going to be able to have a curious and creative relationship with either of them. I think what's so exciting is that it definitely feels that with people like Maggie [Gyllenhaal, director of *The Lost Daughter*] and Greta Gerwig and Chloé Zhao [director of Buckley's rumoured next project, *Hamnet*]… People like Lynne Ramsay and Andrea Arnold, before, were kind of anomalies. And now someone like Greta Gerwig is changing the whole course of what is expected of women. I mean, we've always been able to do it. But whatever people think quantifies, or gives people a gold tick to say, 'Yeah, go' – that's changed. The biggest films in the last few years have been led by incredible women. As a performer in all of that, it gives you strength. A little girl can go, 'Maybe I can do that,' instead of thinking, 'That belongs to a certain kind of person.'

Studios can't hide behind the old narrative that used to say that only guys can handle the big blockbusters.
[Nods] But there's still loads to change. There's still an incredible pay discrepancy between men and women. And that's not

FIVE STAR TURNS

BEAST 2017
After stage, screen and TV work, Buckley made her feature debut in Michael Pearce's serial-killer thriller. In windswept Jersey, Moll is drawn to mysterious outsider Pascal (Johnny Flynn). *Screen Daily* called Buckley 'a force of nature'.

WILD ROSE 2018
Buckley excels as Rose-Lynn, a wannabe country singer whose ambition chafes against the demands of her life as a single mum. 'I'd never really done country before,' said Buckley of a role that showcased her astounding singing voice.

I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS 2020
Charlie Kaufman's brainscrambler sees Buckley's Young Woman head to a remote farm to meet the parents of the boyfriend she's thinking of breaking up with. 'I was so impressed with her performance in [*Beast*],' said Kaufman.

THE LOST DAUGHTER 2021
Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial debut cast Buckley and Olivia Colman as the past/present of translator Leda. Overwhelmed by motherhood, she leaves her children and has an affair. 'I just thought it was incredibly honest,' says Buckley.

FINGERNAILS 2023
In this sci-fi romance, couples take a test to see if they're in love. Working at a 'love institute', Anna is drawn to Amir (Riz Ahmed), despite testing positive with her boyfriend. Buckley's tender turn nails every nuance of Anna's dilemma. **MM**

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just within our industry; that's within every industry. And that means so much. It means that a woman can't buy her own home. It means that she can't go and get a third-level education. These things have a trickle-down effect, which affects a whole option of possibilities for women. There's still lots to do, but I feel like it's moving.

Talking of changing your life, how much has yours changed in the last five years?
When I get a job, I'm still like [mimes shock and delight]. The week before [filming begins], I'm like, 'This was an awful idea. Who said that I should do this?' I feel lucky to keep doing work that I'm still excited by, and impassioned by, and that I feel challenged by. I feel very aware that that might not always be the way. You're only as good as your last job. And my life is still my life. I'm very lucky that I have a very private life outside my work.

Do you still cycle around London? When we met four years ago, you turned up on your bike…
I still cycle! It's the only way to get around London. Except now I'm into Lime bikes. My life hasn't changed. It hasn't. How I work has maybe changed, and the level of what's expected of you, and the pressure of that. But my life is the same, which is brilliant.

'I DON'T KNOW IF I'D DO MARVEL, BUT I'M UP FOR TAKING A BIGGER SPACE'

Has the way you find characters changed? Have you learned things along the way?
I hope I have [laughs]. Yeah, it changes all the time. Every job asks you to work differently, and I love that. For example, I did *Cabaret* six months before I did *Wicked Little Letters*. That was like a marathon. The hardest, most physical, incredible, just 'blew me apart' kind of job. And I'd done, before *Cabaret*, *Men* and *Women Talking* back to back, and had, like, a week off, and then went into *Cabaret*. So by the end of *Cabaret*, I was like, 'I want to have fun. I want to go in and take my hands off the wheel, and just see what happens.' This character was so full of this effervescent freedom that it lends itself brilliantly to just really move through that script with utter pleasure, and to not try to pinch anything in. Every job's different. Some jobs take a year to prep, and you think, 'I still need more.'

Do you ever worry about burning out? You've gone from project to project…
I definitely feel like at the end of a job, I want to hide in a hole, and drink wine, and smoke a fag, and disappear. I live out of London now, so I do disappear. I love being able to do that. But I haven't worked all year, which is the longest time I haven't worked. For different reasons. The strike. Also, look, I've got to pay bills and pay tax. I've got family to look after. I've got responsibilities. I'm a jobbing actress. I've always been a jobbing actress.

Have you consciously stayed in the indie space? You haven't migrated to Marvel-type movies.
Honestly, I'm not that interested in Marvel. I've never actually seen a Marvel. I'm worried about people having to see me in a body legging suit [laughs], all covered in blue paint. But I'm ready. I'm up for it. I don't know if I'd do Marvel, but I'm up for taking a bigger space, if it was right. So, yeah. Who knows?

In some ways, the biggest movie you've done is *Dolittle*, and it was your worst-received film. Is there a lesson there?
Look, I was young. I got to earn enough money to pay rent for a few weeks, and be with all these people that you can learn from. I don't regret it at all. That's what I needed to do at that time in my life. I wouldn't put it first on my CV, but I don't regret it [laughs].

Last time we spoke, you said you don't like horror movies and you'd never do one. Then you did *I'm Thinking of Ending Things*, which is arguably horror, and *Men*, which certainly is…
Well, I guess I'm a big, fat liar [laughs].

Do you think of them as horror movies?
I'm Thinking Of Ending Things I didn't think of as a horror movie. If it's a horror to you, then great. I guess it was more of a psychological mind-fuck. But I loved making that. That was so wild and fun.

It deals with things that horror movies often do, like loneliness and entrapment and anxiety. And going off to a remote farmhouse…
Yeah. I mean, maybe [laughs]. I'm actually really scared of horror films. Maybe I pretended that they weren't. *Men* I knew was some sort of horror. But, honestly, I don't know. I'm really crap with genre stuff.

You don't need to worry about it, do you?
You think about a character's journey, and you create a world, and you try to make it grounded in something.

JESSIE BUCKLEY IN NUMBERS

1
Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress for *The Lost Daughter*

14
FEATURE FILM CREDITS TO HER NAME

2
Films that Buckley had premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival 2023 (*Fingernails* and *Wicked Little Letters*)

$251M
BOX-OFFICE TAKE OF BUCKLEY'S HIGHEST-GROSSING FILM, *DOLITTLE*

17
Songs Buckley performs on the *Wild Rose* soundtrack

'I LOVE DOING THINGS THAT ARE A BIT OBSCURE'

Whatever thing it captures after your performance is kind of nothing to do with you. But no, they were both great. I love doing things that are a bit obscure, and make people feel… I don't need everybody to like it, or love it. If people have different experiences of things, then great.

How was Charlie Kaufman to work with? His films are so anxiety-ridden. Is he like that in real life?
I adore Charlie. He's one of the greatest minds of our time, you know? You talk to any filmmaker, and I guarantee you there's one of [Kaufman's] films or one of his scripts that have been one of the most influential things in their lives. What's sad is that it's so hard for somebody like him to get a film made now, because everything's being driven off an algorithm, or it's sensationalism, or some kind of corporate system. And actually to have an original thought is difficult in our industry right now. I found working with him… He's got a really funny, dark, wild, naughty sense of humour. He's such an interesting director who will give you really abstract notes but that are so specific. For Jesse Plemons and me, for the first two weeks, we were just in a car in a studio. There wasn't anything else but us. Charlie would come in, and he would sit at the back, and he'd just say one thing, and then he'd go out. But that one thing would change the whole course.

Is it daunting to be in a work of such imagination?
His writing is so huge. The language of it, and the possibility of it. As a young actress, do you want to jump into a pool, and learn to swim? Yeah! Do you want something to blow your mind, and you don't know where you are, and you find a way to come through it, and feel like you've got extra muscles? Hell yes, I want to do that. I don't want to put on a blue suit. I don't want to go into something that is, for me, narrow and narrow-minded. His language and his worlds – they have broken boundaries, and created the cinema of our time. I adore him. I hope we can make another film together. I would work with him at the drop of a hat.

How was it being in a room with that head-fuck of a beast at the end of *Men*?
Rory Kinnear – I mean, I love that man with all my heart. It was basically just the two of us for the whole shoot, because he was every man. And he's one of the funniest fuckers I've ever worked with. Honest to God, the amount of times, if you look again, I've had to turn away because

SEBASTIAN KIM / AUGUST

I've just laughed. But I remember, we were heading into the week of that last scene, a night shoot. Getting any kind of prosthetic on ever, it's a big old feat of eight hours sitting in a chair. He was covered, and there'd be different layers of gunk that had to be put on him. He'd be in his little tighty-whitey shorts having smashed banana and blood poured on him. You'd just look at him and go, 'Bad life choices.' We both knew, 'This is so far out. We're just going to have to commit.'

With Rory Kinnear in 2022 folk-horror *Men*

The performance as much as the prosthetics make it scary…

Rory came in, and fell to his knees, and let the first bellow out – or moo, or whatever. It was about one o'clock at night, and he let the first labour pain out, and in the adjoining field, a sheep bellowed back to him [laughs]. The sheep was like, 'Mehrrrrrrrrr!'

Did you watch horror movies growing up?

We had a Halloween party, and we put on [*The*] *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. We lived up by the woods. My dad came into the room, and he was like, 'Everybody get into the car.' He drove us up to the middle of the wood, and was like, 'Everybody get out!' And then he disappeared. There were about five 10-year-olds in the middle of wild Ireland where every tree and every rustle of wind was something coming for you [laughs]. The next thing – we had, for some reason, a hooded cape at home. He came up through the woods, this dark figure arriving in a hooded cape…

No wonder you're scared of horror films!

I actually had [a scary experience] the other night. We live in Norfolk. I was in bed with my husband. We were watching *Under the Skin*, and the next thing I heard was [groans]. We were like, 'Is that in the film?' We stopped it, and it kept going. The house is 1500s, so it's a tiny bit scary anyway. Every time I come in, I have to go, 'Hello, if anybody's here, it's time to leave. Thank you.' I looked out the window, and it was one of those little baby deer that will bark outside the window. We had the fright of our lives.

You mentioned Chloé Zhao earlier. It's rumoured you're the lead in her next film…

I don't know what I can tell you. There's nothing set in stone yet. But I have two things that I'm doing this year that I'm so excited about. Both of the directors and the scripts are beyond incredible. After a year of not working, I've never been more excited about going into a year of work. I can't wait.

Will you be doing more TV? How was making *Chernobyl* and *Fargo* compared to making movies, or performing in *Cabaret*?

I don't see any difference with any of it. You create something, and hope that it works in whatever world you're stepping into. There's so much great TV going on, and amazing writers. It definitely gives writers a place to write more, and go into depth with a character. But, also, I started watching old films recently, with Barbara Stanwyck and Marlene Dietrich. Some of them are 60 minutes. They manage to capture a whole world in those 60 minutes. Actually, even writing music, it's like a mini-film. Each song is like a mini-film. If you can do that in three stanzas of a song, and create a whole world, it's the same with film. I think there's room for all of it. There are so many platforms now.

That's a good thing.

My only worry is… I don't like this algorithm thing. I think for all creatives, your instinct gets dulled down. Companies want things to have a reverberation into every single pocket. That's what's so amazing about someone like Jonathan Glazer. He's so in his thing, and his worlds are so bold and uncompromising. *The Zone of Interest* was my favourite film last year. And something like *Under the Skin*, or [Charlie Kaufman's] *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, lasts beyond the time they were created because they're so pure. I think if somebody's got something to say, let them say it.

WICKED LITTLE LETTERS OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 23 FEBRUARY.

JESSIE BUCKLEY LINE READING

'You get the world you deserve and if you don't fight you deserve the world you fucking get.'
JO ROBINSON
MISBEHAVIOUR

'[COUNTRY MUSIC IS] THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH.'
ROSE-LYNN HARLAN
WILD ROSE

'IT'S GOOD TO REMIND YOURSELF THE WORLD IS LARGER THAN THE INSIDE OF YOUR OWN HEAD.'
YOUNG WOMAN
I'M THINKING OF ENDING THINGS

STUDIOCANAL

EDITED BY
MATTHEW LEYLAND
@TOTALFILM_MATTL

★★★★★
UNMISSABLE

★★★★★
EXCELLENT

★★★★★
GOOD

★★★★★
NOT SO GOOD

★★★★★
POOR

SCREEN

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED MOVIE

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THE ZONE OF INTEREST

Jonathan Glazer explores the banality of evil...

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ALSO RELEASED

We couldn't see them in time for this issue, so head to gamesradar.com/totalfilm for reviews of the following:

TITLE	RELEASE DATE
Argylle	1 February
Bob Marley: One Love	14 February
Madame Web	14 February

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

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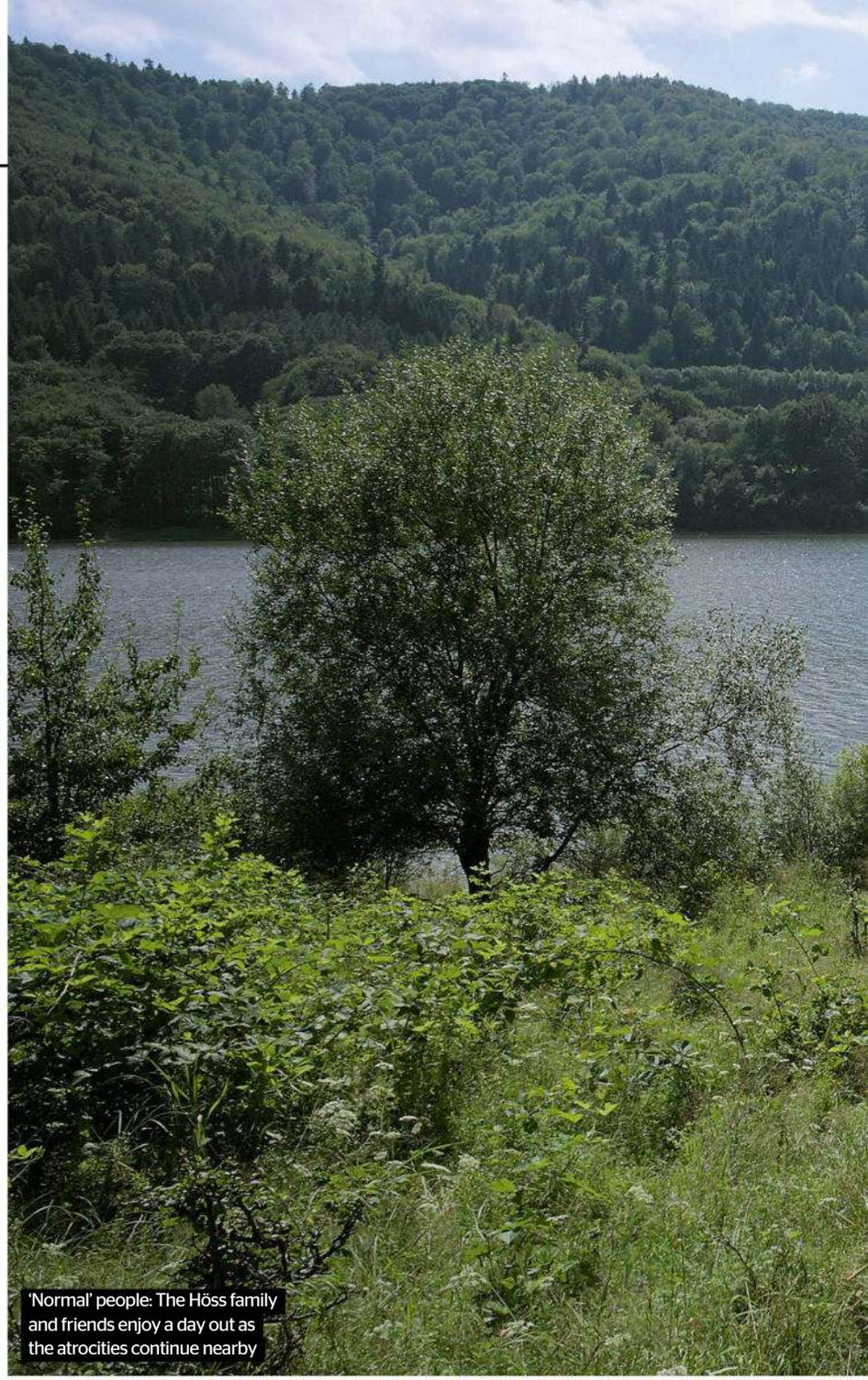
THE ZONE OF INTEREST 12A

The edge of horror...

★★★★★ **OUT 2 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS



'Normal' people: The Höss family and friends enjoy a day out as the atrocities continue nearby

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

THE WHITE RIBBON
2009
Christian Friedel debuted in Michael Haneke's similarly stark study of 'the roots of evil'.

IDA
2013
Hot-shot cinematographer Łukasz Żal scored his big-screen breakout with this Oscar-winning historical drama.

UNDER THE SKIN
2013
Glazer's deft use of hidden cameras in his sci-fi stunner carried over to *The Zone of Interest*.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

Jonathan Glazer's latest is a Holocaust movie in the same way that his 2013 masterpiece *Under the Skin* was a sci-fi invasion flick. Loosely adapting Martin Amis' 2014 novel, writer/director Glazer finds a new way into the historical atrocity that continues to be a source of exploration for filmmakers.

The film's askew view on the horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp comes from the perspective of the real-life commandant Rudolf Höss (Christian Friedel) and his family, who live in provided accommodation that's located just outside the camp. Höss' wife, Hedwig (*Anatomy of a Fall*'s Sandra Hüller), is delighted with the set-up – there's plenty of room for the couple's five children, a spacious garden and areas of bucolic beauty on their doorstop. The unsightly barbed-wire-topped concrete walls that surround the house are not of any real concern; at one point, Hedwig even mentions the flowers she's growing in an attempt to cover them up.

That's just one moment of poisonously bleak humour in a film that has a handful of them, although laughs are invariably short-lived given the horrors that haunt the edges of every frame. While the Höss family seem to somehow manage it, it's impossible to not get caught up in the background details providing clues to what's actually going on next door. From the giant chimneys spewing out flame and smoke, to the steam trails that indicate an incoming train, *The Zone of Interest* plays on our shared knowledge of a grim chapter of history that cannot be forgotten.

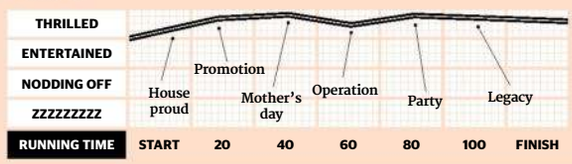
Most haunting of all is the sound design. At virtually all times, there's a low-level background cacophony: rumblings, shrieks, gunshots. It's nearly impossible to isolate individual sounds, but the design generates a constant sense of gut-churning dread, the aural opposite of hearing a playground full of children playing. The contrast with the largely domestic scenes is quite something.

The nightmarish audio goes even further with the score. Glazer reteams with Mica Levi, who so memorably composed the otherworldly *Under the Skin* music. From the off (over an extended title card that fades so gradually it's hard to notice), the eerie score – like the background noise – is hard to unpick into its component parts. A couple of times, the score plays out against a blank screen: occasional artful touches like this offer a counterpoint to the mundanity of the family's existence. There are other similarly punctuating moments, too, not least a couple of night-vision scenes that feel bracingly grounded (like CCTV footage), while also having a dreamlike quality.

Chief among the ideas that the film forces you to consider is

DIRECTOR Jonathan Glazer **STARRING** Christian Friedel, Sandra Hüller, Freya Kreutzkam, Max Beck, Imogen Kogge
SCREENPLAY Jonathan Glazer
DISTRIBUTOR A24 **RUNNING TIME** 105 mins

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



A24

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compartmentalisation. The Höss family have so thoroughly dehumanised the Nazi regime's Jewish victims that they can speak about them like they're a minor inconvenience. Hüller, in particular, is superb, always seeming disarmingly human in her ambitions and frustrations. The characters' lives have a boring familiarity. There's gossip, a slippery career ladder to climb and even children bickering in the backseat to deal with. This contrasting ordinariness somehow sheds new light on the horrors. In one scene, colleagues visit Rudolf to go through some plans for a new cremation chamber, with the dispassionate detachment you might expect from someone running through the features of a new family car. The efficiency of extermination is discussed like sales figures.

'It's impossible to not get caught up in the background details providing clues to what's actually going on next door'

The Zone of Interest really hammers home its central thesis. Plotting is minimal, and time spent in a perspective so closely aligned to these people can be demanding. A brief visit from Hedwig's mother (Imogen Kogge) provides as close to a respite as you'll get. A late and unexpected viewpoint shift upends the film's modus operandi in a startlingly effective way, as the sounds of domesticity play alongside sobering imagery, almost like the inverse of what has gone before it.

This is a challenging and troubling film that asks a lot of the viewer, before sending them away with a great deal to consider. There won't be many films this year that you'll turn over more thoroughly in the hours, days and weeks that follow.

MATT MAYTUM

THE VERDICT Jonathan Glazer's haunting Holocaust movie dissects everyday evil, and proves the peripheral atrocities are impossible to ignore. A singular piece of work.

Seconds later, his grass allergy would kick in and ruin the moment

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

ADAPTATION 2002
A masterful meta-study of failure and high anxiety. Nic Cage excels as the neurotic scribe.

JT LEROY 2018
Kristen Stewart goes all-in as the person who masqueraded as the titular, streetwise author.

SORRY TO BOTHER YOU 2018
A Black telemarketer adopts a 'white' voice in a satirical takedown of corporate culture.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

AMERICAN FICTION 15

Wright to reply...

★★★★★ **OUT 2 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

DIRECTOR Cord Jefferson **STARRING** Jeffrey Wright, Issa Rae, Adam Brody, John Ortiz, Erika Alexander, Sterling K. Brown, Leslie Uggams **SCREENPLAY** Cord Jefferson
DISTRIBUTOR Curzon
RUNNING TIME 117 mins

TV writer Cord Jefferson (HBO's *Watchmen*) makes an auspicious filmmaking debut with this wincingly acute comedy drama. Jeffrey Wright, in a rare but highly satisfying lead, plays Thelonius 'Monk' Ellison, an embittered literature academic whose lofty new book (a reworking of Aeschylus' *The Persians*) has left publishers cold. Instead, he has to stand by and watch fellow Black novelist Sintara Golden (Issa Rae) scoop up the plaudits for her debut novel, *We's Lives in Da Ghetto*.

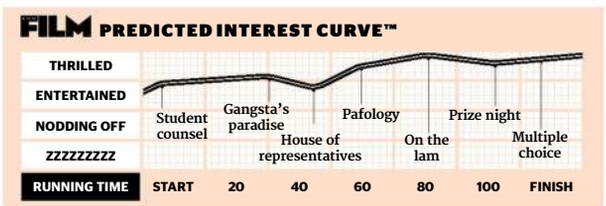
'Books like this are not real. They flatten our lives,' he bemoans, believing that novels focused on Black poverty and crime do nobody any favours – especially when an author like Golden is middle class. In a fit of pique, Monk writes a stereotype-laden rejoinder in the form of *My Pafology*, under the assumed name of Stagg R. Leigh (who can't go public as he's wanted by the police). With encouragement from his agent (John Ortiz), Monk's book is soon picked up by a major publisher, with white executives desperate to cash in on its gritty milieu.

Based on Percival Everett's 2001 novel *Erasure*, which ruthlessly satirises the book industry, *American Fiction* is a wild ride. Writer/director Jefferson deftly mixes laughs with low-key drama, as Monk begins dating near-neighbour Coraline (Erika Alexander) while having to deal with issues surrounding his ailing mother (Leslie Uggams). With a third act that goes full-on meta – delivering one of the best payoffs you'll see all year – it's hard not to swoon over a film this daring.

That said, some elements feel a little out of place. For one, the frequent cutaways to Thelonious' hard-partying brother Cliff (Sterling K. Brown) can get a little tiresome. Then there's the moment where *My Pafology* comes to life on screen, with 'thug-life' characters (played by Keith David and Okieriete Onaodowan) appearing in front of the author – a scene that, ironically, must've looked better on paper.

Luckily, such missteps are few and far between. For the most part, this is tightly written, smartly performed and frequently hilarious – notably in the scenes where Monk meets with Adam Brody's 'visionary' Hollywood director, who is looking to craft an exploitation flick based on his book. And despite the slightly uneven pacing, Wright's sturdy performance keeps things on an even keel. The result is a fiendishly sharp poke at questionable notions of Black representation in the modern world. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT Jeffrey Wright hits a career high in a film that's terrifically funny, beautifully written, thoughtful and provocative.



CURZON, BOHEMIA MEDIA, ICON

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MEMORY TBC

Classy reunion...

★★★★★ **OUT 23 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

A woman who can't forget meets a man who can't remember in a thorny drama that's bleak, sad and hopeful in equal measure. Both a showcase for two superb performances and a complex meditation on how the past shapes the present, Michel Franco's film is also a romance in which two damaged souls forge an unlikely connection.

Care worker Sylvia (Jessica Chastain) is a recovering alcoholic whose life revolves around her job, her sobriety and her daughter, Anna (Brooke Timber). When a school reunion ends with a fellow attendee following her home, her well-ordered existence gets disconcertingly disrupted.

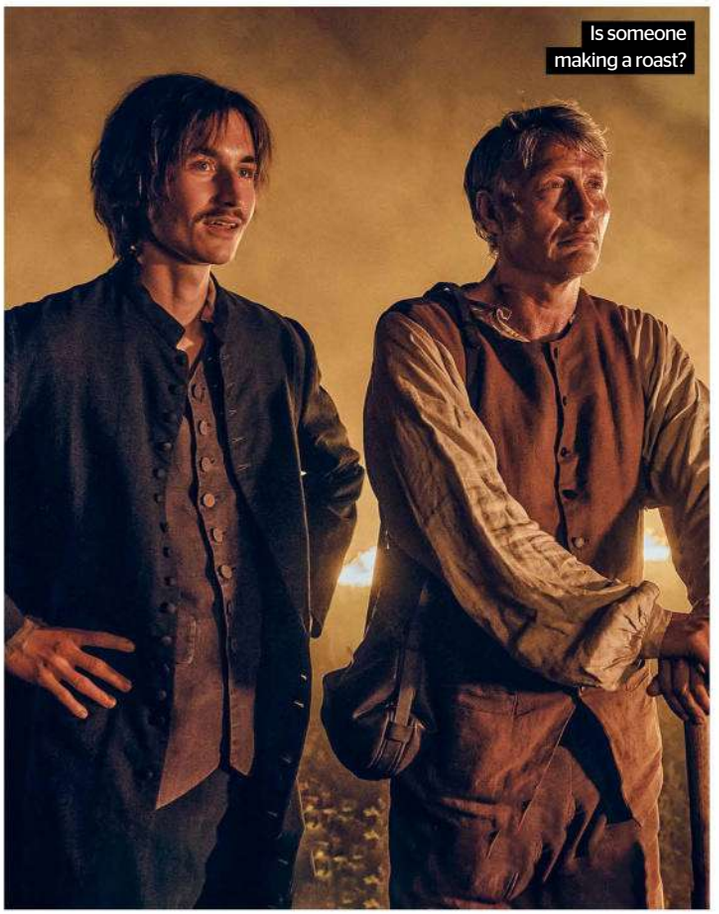
The follower in question is Saul (Peter Sarsgaard), a widower with early-onset dementia who may or may not be one of the classmates who assaulted her as a teenager. An offer from Saul's niece (*Eighth Grade*'s Elsie Fisher) to step in as his carer might be a chance for Sylvia to exact retribution – if only she could be as sure of her recollections as Saul is as shorn of his.

Chastain and Sarsgaard make a riveting duo in a film that is in no great hurry to elucidate its mysteries. An electrifying late confrontation between Sylvia and her estranged mother (Jessica Harper) offers a degree of clarity, however, while the ending contains a glimmer of hard-won optimism. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT

A tough and draining watch that's worth enduring for its well-matched leads' compelling star turns.

Jessica Chastain gives a typically committed performance



Is someone making a roast?

THE PROMISED LAND 15

There will be spuds...

★★★★★ **OUT 16 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

Headlined by Mads Mikkelsen, this Nordic frontier western sees filmmaker Nikolaj Arcel return to his native Denmark to put a firm stake in the ground following his disappointing 2017 adaptation of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*.

In 1755, retired captain Ludvig Kahlen (Mikkelsen) is seeking to tame the wild heath of Jutland by cultivating a crop of potatoes. He's honouring the king's desires, but local landowner Frederik de Schinkel (Simon Bennebjerg), a drunk and a sadist, insists that Kahlen is trespassing. A brutal battle of wills unfolds, punctuated by callous violence.

Superbly played by the leads, this savage indictment of class, racial prejudice and male pride is grounded by the more practical needs of two women: Edel (Kristine Kujath Thorp), the cousin of de Schinkel who's expected to marry the bratty tyrant, and Ann Barbara (Amanda Collin), who's escaped his cruel ownership and now tends to Kahlen's house. Also key is Anmai Mus (Melina Hagberg), a Roma girl who forges a makeshift family with Ludvig and Ann.

Absorbing throughout, *The Promised Land* (or *The Bastard*, as the Danish title translates) manages to successfully sprout some rousing entertainment – delicious boo-hiss villainy and a love-triangle subplot – from an earthy drama that's as handsome and merciless as the landscapes in which it's rooted. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

THE VERDICT

This rip-roaring historical drama is the best film about growing potatoes since *The Martian*.

This film unfolds a portrait of a city whose spaces harbour ghosts of past barbarities

OCCUPIED CITY TBC

Out of the past...

★★★★☆ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

From *12 Years a Slave* to the richly textured *Small Axe* anthology, director Steve McQueen's historical testimonials brim with ambition and resonance. Yet even by those standards, the director delivers something unprecedented with this 262-minute mix of documentary and psychogeography, contemplating Germany's World War Two occupation of Amsterdam by way of the pandemic.

Inspired by his wife Bianca Stigter's book *Atlas of an Occupied City: Amsterdam 1940-1945*, McQueen combines footage of the Netherlands capital circa lockdown with voiceover accounts of wartime horrors.

Sometimes the images and narration illuminate one another, sometimes they diverge. And sometimes the points made are perhaps opaque; elsewhere, though, McQueen's intent is more emphatic. The accounts of antisemitic atrocities horrify, while overheard discussions about 'memes and shit' contrast starkly with reports of executions.

Even with a 15-minute interval, the four-hour haul can make for challenging viewing. But McQueen's sometimes gliding, sometimes still camera captures tableaux that invite interpretation and active engagement, deepened by ambient scoring and suggestive bursts of pop (Bowie, notably). When we reach the shot of a Ukrainian girl, the result emerges as a serious-minded work of great cumulative power: a dispatch from history for a precarious present. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT McQueen's demanding doc is a rigorous and rewarding watch: meditative, melancholy and layered with meaning.

THE JUNGLE BUNCH WORLD TOUR TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY**

CINEMAS

This globe-trotting sequel to 2017's *The Jungle Bunch*, itself spun off from a French kids' television series, sees penguin Maurice (Scott Humphrey) and his fellow misfits travel the world in search of a scientist who can foil an evil beaver's plot to destroy their tropical home. Chaotic adventures follow, many of them derivative of superior mainstream fare (*Ice Age*, *Kung Fu Panda*). Yet a visit to an animal alt-Paris does fleetingly tickle, while the target audience's chaperones may appreciate the nods to *Raiders* and *Mad Max*'s Furiosa. **NEIL SMITH**

GASSED UP 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY**

CINEMAS

As swaggering and revved-up as its swooping moped gang, this self-consciously 'street' crime drama skids into a predictable cautionary tale. George Amponsah's feature centres on London teenager Ash (Stephen Odubola), whose phone-swiping skills embed him in a ruthless Albanian crime family. Amponsah makes nimble use of GoPro cameras, dropping you into the whizzy, adrenalin-pumping bike raids. But a clunking script and one-note characters keeps it far short of the bleak brilliance of, say, *Top Boy*. Odubola, who gives Ash a nicely bewildered decency, is frankly wasted here. **KATE STABLES**

OUT OF DARKNESS 15

★★★☆☆ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY**

CINEMAS

Formerly known as *The Origin*, first-timer Andrew Cummings' spare chiller follows a group of early human settlers as they try to make a new home in desolate territory, only to find themselves being picked off from the shadows. A Stone Age *Scream*? It's more a Paleolithic *Prey*, as resourceful 'stray' Beyah (Safia Oakley-Green, one to watch) steps up to take on the unseen predator. A third-act pivot disappoints, but Cummings (aided by *Saint Maud* DoP Ben Fordesman) deftly taps into a vein of primal horror during the suspenseful low-lit encounters. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

MIGRATION TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 2 FEBRUARY**

CINEMAS

Illumination's latest animated feature feels featherlight, even when served with a bonus *Despicable Me* short. A migrating mallard family flies from the US to Jamaica, despite the misgivings of worrywart dad Mack (*The Big Sick*'s Kumail Nanjiani). The journey is slowed down by episodic capers along the way, while Mike White's screenplay lacks the respective satire/warmth of *The White Lotus*/*School of Rock*. The big-eyed expressions are enjoyably Looney Tunes, and the younger characters get a couple of big laughs. But overall it's hard to give a duck. **MATT MAYTUM**

MODERN FILMS, VERTIGO, SIGNATURE, UNIVERSAL, MUBI, DFI, SONY, KALEIDOSCOPE, STUDIOCANAL

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THE SETTLERS 15

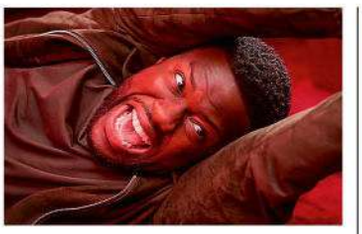
★★★☆☆ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY**
CINEMAS

Framed as an arthouse western, writer/director Felipe Gálvez Haberle's debut follows a three-man expedition ordered by landowner José Menéndez (Alfredo Castro) to clear a trail for livestock. Tensions simmer between the trio – a British army captain (Mark Stanley), a Texan mercenary (Benjamin Westfall) and a Chilean native of mixed heritage (Camilo Arancibia) – and atrocities are committed. Set in 1901, this opaque exploration of the genocide of the Indigenous Selk'nam people, and Chile's subsequent forging of a national identity, is slow-moving but punctuated by heart-stopping scenes. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

GETTING IT BACK: THE STORY OF CYMANDE 12A

★★★★☆ **OUT 16 FEBRUARY**
CINEMAS **26 FEBRUARY** BD, BFI PLAYER

Forged in 70s South London against a backdrop of rising racism, funk pioneers Cymande made otherworldly, melting-pot music that hit big in America, but was almost completely ignored back home. Catching up with the still-together group, Tim Mackenzie-Smith's joyous doc offers some *Searching for Sugar Man*-style reappraisal. Talking heads, including producer Mark Ronson and DJs Norman Jay and Cut Chemist, explain how extraordinary songs such as *The Message* helped inspire hip-hop, disco and house. The Cym-aissance starts here… **MATT GLASBY**



LIFT 12

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** NETFLIX

Distinctly echoing Netflix's own *Red Notice* (starry cast, art theft, Interpol), this fun but by-numbers crime caper sees Kevin Hart's heist crew team up with agent Gugu Mbatha-Raw in a bid to thwart a terror plot. Their mission? To swipe $500m of gold from a mid-flight passenger plane. Hart gives a surprisingly low-key performance, leaving heist-mates Billy Magnussen and Vincent D'Onofrio to bring the LOLs. At a tight 100 minutes, F. Gary Gray's movie doesn't overstay its welcome; it loses some altitude around the midpoint, but then builds to a pleasingly dramatic – if nonsensical – climax. **MOLLY EDWARDS**

HAMLET TBC

★★☆☆☆ **OUT 27 FEBRUARY**
CINEMAS

Sean Mathias abridges his own age- and gender-blind stage production into a two-hour thriller, set in and around Windsor's Theatre Royal. Coming across like an experimental dress rehearsal, this gimmicky version of the Bard's revenge tragedy isn't quite madness, but there's precious little method in it. Ian McKellen's droll Dane sporadically proves that brevity is the soul of wit, but here it's mostly the enemy of nuance. With bizarre staging choices and outsized turns from at least two seasoned thesps, only its magnetic lead spares it from one-star ignominy. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

Toast's annual sale was a big day in Littlehampton

WICKED LITTLE LETTERS 15

Mail disorder...

★★★☆☆ **OUT 23 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

A real-life 1920s scandal takes centre stage in Thea Sharrock's dark comedy. It's set in the quaint English coastal town of Littlehampton, where residents begin receiving a series of foul-mouthed anonymous letters. Accusations are levelled at Rose (Jessie Buckley), an Irish immigrant and single mum viewed with suspicion by some – notably pious neighbour Edith (Olivia Colman), who still lives with her parents (Timothy Spall, Gemma Jones) and seems envious of Rose's free-spirited ways.

When the police (Hugh Skinner, Paul Chahidi) are called, little progress is made. Only Gladys (Anjana Vasan), an intuitive WPC, has the sense to believe that Rose might not be the guilty party, but of course, this being 1920, she's patronised by the patriarchy, her hunches ignored.

Colman and Buckley are eminently watchable, supported by a uniformly excellent cast from the sublime Vasan to the likes of Jason Watkins, Joanna Scanlan and Eileen Atkins.

The main sticking point is the tone. Sharrock (*Me Before You*) doesn't seem entirely comfortable with Jonny Sweet's screenplay, which erratically mixes dark humour (the tirades of four-letter words in the misanthropic missives) with wider social issues (women's suffrage, domestic violence). Throughout, there's a tendency to descend into farce that hampers these letters' potential to say something more profound. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE VERDICT An ultimately rather cosy tale of British eccentricity, enlivened by a superb cast.

'Whoa! No more beans before matches, I'm begging you!'

SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED

THE WRESTLER 2008
Mickey Rourke puts his broken body on the line in Darren Aronofsky's tale of redemption.

FIGHTING WITH MY FAMILY 2019
Florence Pugh seeks WWE fame (with The Rock's help) in Stephen Merchant's comedy.

CASSANDRO 2023
Gael García Bernal plays a convention-bucking exotico in Roger Ross Williams' biopic.

For more reviews visit gamesradar.com/totalfilm

THE IRON CLAW 15

Brothers in arm bands...

★★★★★ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

DIRECTOR Sean Durkin **STARRING** Zac Efron, Jeremy Allen White, Harris Dickinson, Maura Tierney, Lily James **SCREENPLAY** Sean Durkin **DISTRIBUTOR** Lionsgate **RUNNING TIME** 132 mins

Triumph and tragedy form an inseparable tag team in writer/director Sean Durkin's emotional chronicle of the Von Erich clan, a close-knit family of sibling wrestlers whose rise to prominence in 1980s Texas was accompanied by a remorseless, almost Shakespearean succession of setbacks.

Giving their sport a level of respect not often granted, the film calculates the cost the boys paid trying to live up to their father-slash-coach's exacting standards – a price that made each of them genuinely fear that their surname came with a curse. Named for a head-gripping palm move that patriarch Fritz (Holt McCallany) made his signature during his time in the ring, *The Iron Claw* is upfront from the start about wrestling's choreographed fakery. Yet it also gives its practitioners their due by showing both the arduous training required to mould their muscular physiques, and the risk of serious injury they face even when partaking in pre-scripted theatrics.

The most startling transformation here is Zac Efron's, the *High School Musical* heart-throb resembling Lou Ferrigno's Hulk as the ambitious, if somewhat charisma-light, Kevin. Yet Durkin's saga is very much an ensemble effort that ensures all of the brothers – blond-haired trash-talker David (Harris Dickinson), thwarted Olympian discus-chucker Kerry (Jeremy Allen White) and amiable wannabe musician Mike (Stanley Simons) – get their moment to shine.

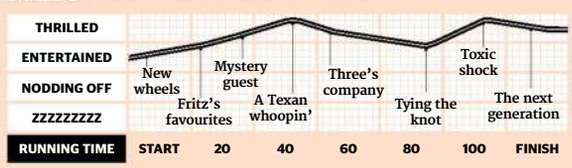
That each fleeting snapshot of glory comes with a cruelly inexplicable postscript gives Durkin's follow-up to 2020's *The Nest* a chilling fatalism. (Not for nothing does Kevin insist that the son he has with Lily James' veterinarian, Pam, has his mother's maiden name on his birth certificate.)

At the same time, though, the film embraces the camp world the boys operate in, with its baying audiences, pantomime villains and lurid Spandex outfits. DoP Mátyás Erdély brings his camera in tight during the body-slamming action, so much so that you can almost smell the baby oil. Yet he is capable of great lyricism, too: an idyllic scene of the brothers spending a lazy day on the river pays off later on with a reunion that's as poignant as it is unexpected.

Efron may be top-billed, but there is equally fine work from McCallany as the fam's tyrannical taskmaster and Maura Tierney as the withholding mother behind him. Only James feels a little out of place, her vivacity striking a discordant note in a story so permeated with misfortune. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT Sensitive rather than sensationalist, this is an engrossing grapple with a wrestling dynasty that was blessed with pecs appeal yet dogged by bad luck.

FILM PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



LIONSGATE, SKY, TULL STORIES, ALTITUDE, DARTMOUTH, BLACK BEAR

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THE BEEKEEPER 15

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Director David Ayer (*End of Watch*, *Fury*, *Suicide Squad*) here tries his hand at an 80s-throwback action thriller. The requisite hard-nut star is Jason Statham, whose tranquil beekeeper, Adam Clay, *of course* has a shadowy past and a particular set of skills that are once more called into action. It's routine stuff, though what starts off as a roaring rampage of personal revenge grows in scope to assume national stakes. Meanwhile, the climactic fight dishes real pain – an analogue treat after The Stath's cartoonish smackdowns in the Fast & Furious franchise. Josh Hutcherson, Bobby Naderi, Jeremy Irons and Minnie Driver also star. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

YOUR FAT FRIEND 15

★★★★★ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

Sifting delicately through US fat-acceptance activist Aubrey Gordon's awkward family life, this doco traces her six-year rise from anonymous blogger to bestselling author. Director Jeanie Finlay's gentle style nimbly captures Gordon's growing confidence, but also the terrifying torrent of online threats menacing her. Sparky and wry about the stigmatisation of certain body types, Gordon makes eloquent and thought-provoking pleas for an end to fat-phobic culture. It feels like a missed opportunity not to engage more with health issues related to the subject matter, but this remains a sympathetic, if slow-moving, portrait. **KATE STABLES**

SHOSHANA TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 16 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

The complicated origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict are effectively if stodgily recounted in Michael Winterbottom's (*This England*, *A Mighty Heart*) 30s-based thriller. Set in Tel Aviv at a time when the area was under British colonial rule, it's a modestly involving tale of two officials (Douglas Booth, Harry Melling) whose attempts to root out terrorists only exacerbate tensions. Caught in the middle is Booth's Jewish girlfriend, Shoshana (Irina Starshenbaum), a peculiarly marginal presence in a film that steadily distils political complexities into a violent series of *Godfather*-style, tit-for-tat killings. **NEIL SMITH**

SOMEONE'S DAUGHTER, SOMEONE'S SON TBC

★★★★★ **OUT 16 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

Exploring homelessness in the UK, this documentary by Lorna Tucker (2018's *Westwood*) is part autobiography, part call for social action. Tucker herself was on the streets as a teenager, and her story – as well as many others here – paints an empathetic picture of the human cost of falling through the cracks. There are contributions from those working in the sector – including John Bird, co-founder of *The Big Issue* – and though it's not always clear what the solution is, the appeal to our shared humanity is deeply moving. **TIM COLEMAN**

Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor stars as Isabel Wilkerson

ORIGIN TBC

On the write track...

★★★★★ **OUT 8 MARCH** CINEMAS

Writer/director Ava DuVernay's (*Selma*) biographical drama delves into the creation of Isabel Wilkerson's 2020 non-fiction bestseller *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, in which the author reframes America's historical and current racism through the lens of the caste systems in India and Nazi Germany. The result is a film that works as both a broad educational tool and a tender portrait of grief – although it might have been just as effective as a documentary.

During her voyage of discovery, Wilkerson (Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor) experiences a series of devastating personal losses that give her mission greater meaning. Her investigations allow her to find ways to say goodbye to loved ones, as well as to antiquated syntax and race relations.

It's an approach that doesn't always work. Watching Wilkerson writing a book simply isn't as arresting as the historical details she uncovers. And although the theoretical aspects of the story serve as a taster – spurring audiences to do their own post-credits research – the condensing of Wilkerson's treatise sometimes reduces it to repetition and bluntness.

Where DuVernay really succeeds is in capturing the universal experience of loss: the regrets, the suffocating sorrow. One family unit is presented so vibrantly, Wilkerson's mourning is felt acutely. Meanwhile, a small but shameful historical incident involving a nine-year-old cowering on a Li-lo will leave you truly raw. **JANE CROWTHER**

THE VERDICT It might feel too simplistic for those who've read the book – and too scholastic for those who haven't – but DuVernay's drama remains a powerful conversation-starter.

THE TASTE OF THINGS 12A

Fancy some quality 'noche?

★★★★★ **OUT 14 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

Between the shouty sandwich-slinging of *The Bear* and the haute-cuisine horror of *The Menu*, recent foodie dramas have really cranked up the sizzle. But this tender and exquisite period piece favours a more quietly intense approach, dropping you right into the creation of an incredible gourmet meal for its first, gloriously uninterrupted 38 minutes.

It's 1885; Juliette Binoche's gentle Eugénie has been cooking for wealthy gourmand Dodin (a lip-smacking Benoît Magimel) for two decades. The camera weaves closely around her braising, sauce-skimming excellence as if she were a painter serving up works of art. But when she refuses Dodin's marriage proposal, he sets out to woo her by cooking an elaborate meal he hopes will capture her taste buds and her heart.

Like *Babette's Feast* (1987), it's a film about how cooking is an act of love, and how shared passion for food kindles real passion (the scoffing of oysters and caviar – in one opulent bite – has never looked more erotic). Anh Hung Tran, who won Best Director at Cannes for this mouth-watering drama, has a lush, watchful visual style (his 1993 classic *The Scent of Green Papaya* is similarly immersive). Among the gleaming roasts, he celebrates the kitchen choreography involved in a humble beef stew, suggesting *Ratatouille*-style that the simplest dish can be sublime if made with love. **KATE STABLES**

THE VERDICT

Binoche and Magimel keep the emotion simmering in this gorgeous tribute to slow food and slow cinema.

'You guys up for a Domino's pizza tonight instead? Yeah, me too...'

Clique and collect: Cady (Angourie Rice, centre) prepares to infiltrate North Shore High's A-list

MEAN GIRLS 12A

Recycled Plastics...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

In 2004, *Mean Girls* had surprise on its side. Sharper than your average teen-com, it turned a canny riff on cliques into a quotable meme machine. Even with songs and social media added to the mix, this enjoyable but safe via-Broadway redo lacks that freshness. Returning writer Tina Fey's script offers tweaks to details more than bold rethinks. And despite co-directors Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr.'s previous with shorts and pop videos, the film only fitfully summons the gusto that fans of musicals might expect.

Among the better decisions, the stage show's framing device becomes a TikTok prologue. After a nifty tent-based segue from Africa to the US, brainy Cady Heron (Angourie Rice) arrives at North Shore High, struggling to position herself between the outsiders – Janis (Auli'i Cravalho) and Damian (Jaquel Spivey) – and the Plastics. Cady soon trades studies for status as she infiltrates the latter, enacting Janis' revenge on 'queen bee' Regina (Reneé Rapp) for past grievances.

The cast makes the grade. Rice's guileless lead contrasts nicely with Rapp's resting OMG face. The adults seem to be having more fun still (Busy Philipps, Jon Hamm, a returning Tim Meadows and Fey herself). Alas, the cookie-cutter songs over-extend the plot, leaving the second half saggy. A livelier Revenge Party lifts proceedings, but ultimately this revisit trades surprise for knowing recognition and nostalgia. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT

A little more than a remake yet less than a makeover, Fey's revisit needed more daring to be wholly worthwhile.

PICTUREHOUSE. PARAMOUNT. MUBI. UNIVERSAL. STUDIOCANAL. SKY. BULLDOG

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

ONE MORE SHOT 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** SKY CINEMA, NOW

The single-take gimmick that steered *1917* to Oscar glory lends a sleek kineticism to this sequel to 2021's *One Shot*, again directed by James Nunn. This time, tireless SEAL Jake Harris (Scott Adkins) finds an airport full of mercenaries waiting when he returns to the US with the terror suspect (Waleed Elgadi) he spent the first film protecting. Slickly choreographed carnage only goes so far, alas, in what ultimately resembles an overextended episode of *24*, complete with bonkers conspiracy plot and the use of sadistic torture as an interrogation technique. **NEIL SMITH**

BAGHEAD 15

★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

When Iris (Freya Allan) inherits a broken-down pub from her estranged father (Peter Mullan), she finds it comes with a basement tenant – a shapeshifting creature with burlap on its bonce. Through said creature, punters can commune with the dead… but at what cost? Alberto Corredor's feature debut expands on his same-titled 2017 short, but lessens the original's mystery and menace with its additional characters, backstories and creature mythology. It also, unfortunately, arrives not long after breakout hit *Talk to Me*, which explores similar territory with greater bite. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

NIGHT SWIM 15

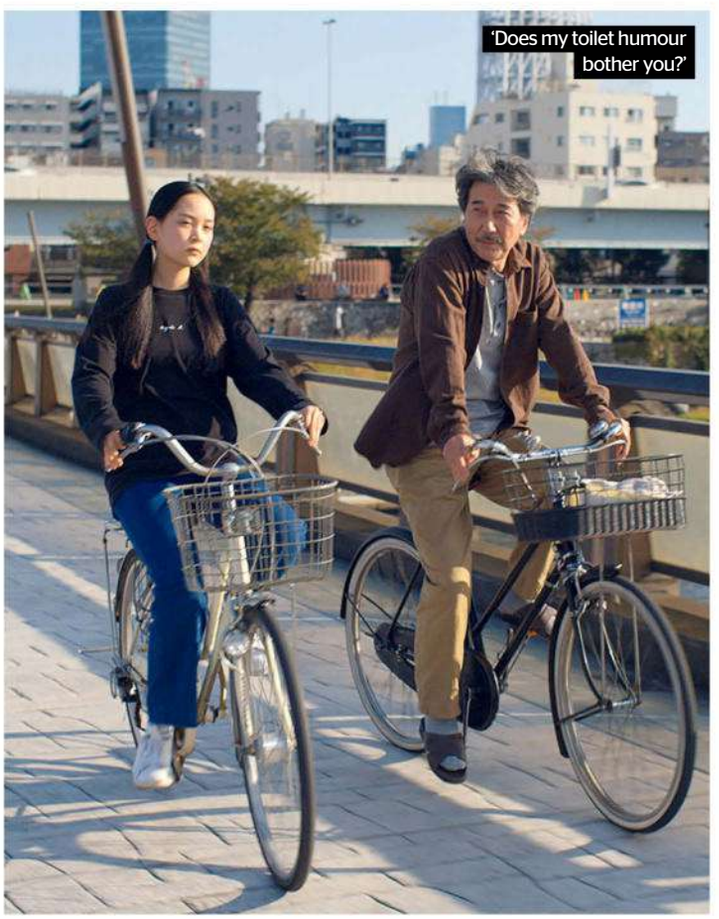
★☆☆☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS

Despite credible backing from horror kings Jason Blum and James Wan, this feature-length take on director Bryce McGuire's own 2014 short sinks like a stone. A family moves into a new home with an outdoor pool harbouring a malevolent force in its depths… Is the water possessed? Does it heal? Why is sacrifice so important? All questions that are answered unsatisfactorily by the increasingly nonsensical script. Even worse, the film just isn't scary. Stars Kerry Condon and Wyatt Russell are game for the ride, but are left with precious little to work with by this muddled, zero-thrills mess. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

THE CIVIL DEAD TBC

★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** CINEMAS, DIGITAL

Rocking an aggressively indie vibe, this shoestring comedy captures every introvert's nightmare: hanging out with a friend who refuses to accept when it's time to go. A chance encounter with an old acquaintance (co-writer Whitmer Thomas) takes a surreal twist when LA photographer Clay (writer/director Clay Tatum) learns that he's spent the day bonding with a ghost – which links the pair more inexorably than he would prefer… The absurdist humour and nasally performances may grate, but this misanthropic take on *The Sixth Sense* manages not to overstay its welcome. **JOEL HARLEY**



PERFECT DAYS PG

All cisterns go…

★★★★☆ **OUT 23 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

The life of a humble toilet cleaner servicing latrines in Tokyo's Shibuya district might not seem like a concept flush with promise. But in veteran director Wim Wenders' (*Anselm, Paris, Texas*) quietly affecting, beautifully modulated study of everyday human existence, it becomes a rich and resonant metaphor for the simple pleasures of making do, counting your blessings and deriving satisfaction from a job well done.

Every morning Hirayama (Kôji Yakusho) awakes, trims his tache and sets off to work in the minivan that houses his sanitary equipment. His regime is a solitary one, soundtracked by whichever of his vintage cassette tapes (Patti Smith, Lou Reed) takes his fancy that day.

Yet while his routine rarely alters, his interactions with a young work-shy apprentice (Tokio Emoto), a niece who pays him an unexpected visit (Arisa Nakano) and the various urbanites he meets on his rounds make each day as different as the photographs he takes during his lunch break of sunlight refracted through foliage.

Exploring the Japanese notion of 'mono no aware' (a philosophical term for the awareness of impermanence), *Perfect Days* is a meditative film that requires patience and forbearance. Stick with it, though, and you'll be amply rewarded, not least by the way it lightheartedly celebrates Tokyo's cutting-edge public conveniences. **NEIL SMITH**

THE VERDICT

A modest drama that gently asks the viewer to surrender to its intimate, contemplative rhythm.

STIGMATA 15

1999 ★★☆☆☆ **OUT NOW**

DUAL FORMAT

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆ Commentary, Making of, Deleted scenes, Alt ending, Booklet

This stylised shocker from Rupert Wainwright (2005's *The Fog* remake) wants to be *Se7en*, but feels more like a forgotten grunge video. Patricia Arquette is Frankie, a hairdresser who starts having religious visions and, apparently, self-wounding. Trying to save her is sexy priest Father Andrew (Gabriel Byrne, who received a joint Razzie nod for this and *End of Days*). It's badly written and choppily edited, and the fact that it's been re-released in a gorgeous collector's edition with plentiful extras is a greater mystery than anything happening on screen. **MATT GLASBY**

INSIDE 18

2007 ★★★★☆ **OUT 5 FEBRUARY** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Featurettes, Book, Art cards

Directors Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury left an indelible mark on noughties horror with this grisly home-invasion film; alongside the likes of *Haute Tension* and *Martyrs*, *Inside* was hailed as a key work of extreme French cinema. It still makes for distressing viewing, thanks to its visceral violence and taboo-smashing premise, in which a heavily pregnant woman (Alysson Paradis) is beset on Christmas Eve by an interloper (Béatrice Dalle) hell-bent on getting her hands on the unborn child. Second Sight's quality package includes new commentaries, interviews and a 70-page essay book. **JOEL HARLEY**

Chris Cooper plays Sam Deeds, a Texas lawman investigating a murder

LONE STAR 15

Sayles' classic, finally unearthed...

1996 ★★★★★ **OUT 26 FEBRUARY** BD, 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★☆☆ Featurettes, Essay

I want them to cross the border,' says writer/director John Sayles (*Eight Men Out*, *Matewan*) when asked by filmmaker Gregory Nava what he desires viewers to take from *Lone Star*. It's the resonant parting shot in a newly recorded 40-minute chat about Sayles' long-unavailable masterpiece and his 45-year career as a figurehead of American independent cinema. Meanwhile, this Criterion disc's other new interview, with DoP Stuart Dryburgh (*The Piano*, *Once Were Warriors*), explores how *Lone Star* transitions so smoothly between its twin timelines.

Set in the 90s and 50s, the film is all about borders, be they between races, fathers and sons or past and present. It opens with the discovery of a skeleton in the desert outside the Tex-Mex border town of Frontera. The bones belong to corrupt sheriff Charlie Wade (Kris Kristofferson), who, legend has it, was run out of town in 1957 by heroic lawman Buddy Deeds (Matthew McConaughey). Buddy's son, Sam (Chris Cooper), is now the sheriff, and his murder investigation agitates racial tensions.

At once a detective story, a western and a film noir, *Lone Star* finds the political in the personal and offers a microcosm of America as it paints a vividly detailed portrait of a community. Quietly riveting, it subverts John Ford's 'print the legend' ethos and boasts one of the most radical final lines in American cinema. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

VERDICT Sayles marries his signature politics and social conscience to an engrossing murder mystery. Exceptional.

ONE FROM THE HEART: REPRISE 12

1981 ★★★☆☆ **OUT 16 FEBRUARY**

CINEMAS

A musical fantasy about romantic fantasy, Francis Ford Coppola's infamous flop (returning in a 4K restoration) stands as a flawed but fitfully captivating dream story. Two lovers (Frederic Forrest, Teri Garr) fight; splintered, they embark on a neon-drunk 4 July night of infidelity. While their Vegas odysseys trace rote arcs, the songs (by Tom Waits, with singer Crystal Gayle – see p90) stun, the surreal set-pieces sing and the production designs pop. Like Nastassja Kinski's tightrope interlude, the result is a high-wire act: sometimes risky and precarious, sometimes nimble and entrancing. **KEVIN HARLEY**

LA BAMBA 15

1987 ★★★☆☆ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Making of, Featurettes, Audition footage, Essay

Boosting the careers of lead Lou Diamond Phillips and band Los Lobos, this biopic of Chicano star Ritchie Valens is a slight yet sensitive rock 'n' roll fable. Director Luis Valdez frames it as a tale of innocence/experience, highlighting the contrasts between Phillips' charismatic Ritchie and drunken sibling Bob (Esai Morales). Hints of sexism and sentimentality rankle, but the songs and snapshots of community provide strong anchorage before Valens' too-soon death. Exemplary extras include a Valdez interview reflecting on the much-debated casting of Phillips. **KEVIN HARLEY**

SPIRIT/CRITERION, SECOND SIGHT, PARK CIRCUS, SECOND RUN, WARNER, COLUMBIA PICTURES

SUBSCRIBE AT TOTALFILM.COM/SUBS

MEAN STREETS 15

1973 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD, 4K UHD, DUAL FORMAT

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Documentary, Featurettes, Book, Art cards

What's a 'mook'? All you'll ever need to know about Scorsese's breakthrough movie, inspired by the Little Italy of his youth, is on this extras-laden disc, with producer Jonathan T. Taplin's new interview particularly strong on *Mean Streets*' making, distribution and reaction. The film itself is as vivid as ever, thanks to electric performances from De Niro and Keitel, the groundbreaking soundtrack, and a 4K restoration overseen by Scorsese and Thelma Schoonmaker. Dual-format limited edition includes 178-page book and eight art cards. **JAMIE GRAHAM**

IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT U

1934 ★★★★★ **OUT 9 FEBRUARY** CINEMAS

Back in cinemas for its 90th anniversary, Frank Capra's opposites-attract road-trip romcom was the first movie to take home the five big Oscars (Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Adapted Screenplay). Its wit, charm and delicious dialogue (by regular Capra collaborator Robert Riskin) hold up beautifully in this 4K restoration. Claudette Colbert is the runaway heiress who hitches a ride and trades barbs with Clark Gable's roguish reporter amid a media frenzy. The result is a screwball delight whose success nudged Columbia Pictures into the Hollywood big leagues. **MATT LOOKER**

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO 12

2022 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** DVD, BD, 4K UHD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Documentary, Featurettes, Essays

A handcrafted, heartfelt wonder, GdT's stop-motion feature gets the Criterion treatment here. Extras include lead doc *Handcarved Cinema*, where del Toro hymns the 'sacred' elements of the stop-mo art. Details abound, like the number of 'masks' (870) Pinocchio had for each emotion. Q&As with Neil Gaiman/Jim Cameron illuminate, while the 'eight rules of animation' featurette honours the animators who doubled as actors, performing through their puppets. One guy falls down the stairs for his art: now that's commitment. **KEVIN HARLEY**

JERZY SKOLIMOWSKI BOX SET 12

1965-68 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD

EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentaries, Intros, Shorts, Booklets

Though Polish auteur Jerzy Skolimowski (the recent *EO*) has spent the bulk of his six-decade career working outside of his homeland, this welcome box set includes two monochrome mid-60s films (*Walkover* and *Barrier*) made in Poland before he went into exile, and portmanteau feature *Dialogue 20-40-60*, where he's one of three Eastern European helmers. The standout is the surreal, jazz-scored *Barrier*, in which a disillusioned medical student wanders Warsaw and falls for a tram driver. Extras include early shorts and a booklet for each feature. **TOM DAWSON**

THE CIRCUS U

Man on wire...

1928 ★★★★★ **OUT NOW** BD

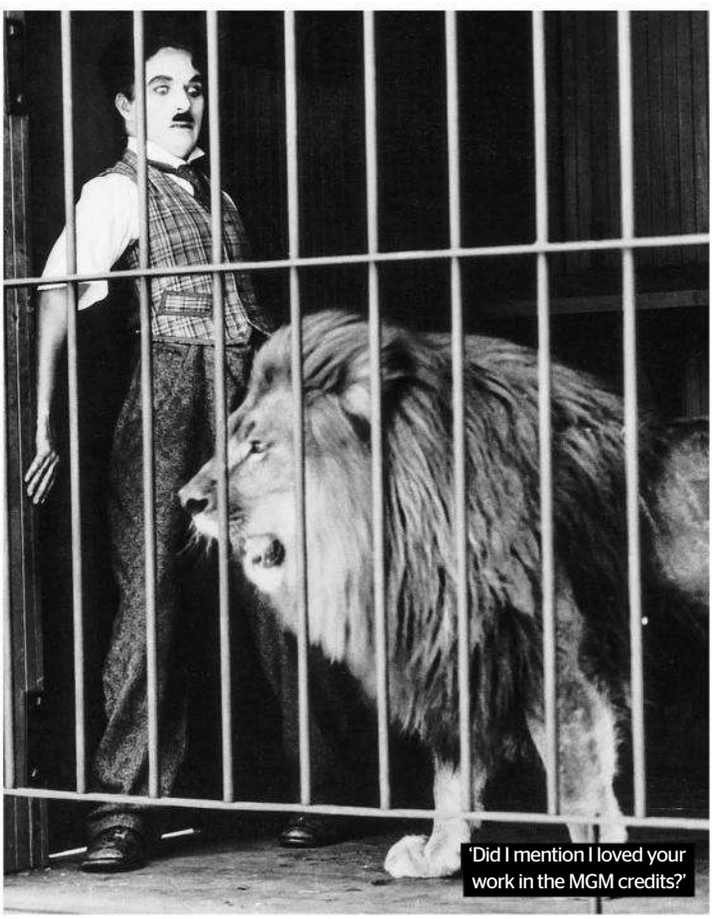
EXTRAS ★★★★★ Commentary, Documentary, Featurettes, Outtakes, Essay

Is *The Circus* Charlie Chaplin's most 'underrated' film, as argued by the doc *Chaplin Today* in this fine Criterion package? It's tough to dispute. Released between *The Gold Rush* (1925) and *City Lights* (1931) – both more famous – the 1928 film bagged a 'special honorary' Oscar but wasn't even mentioned in Chaplin's autobiography.

Did Chaplin want to forget its troubled two-year production? Maybe, but *The Circus* brims with giddy invention and self-referential ingenuity. The plot involves the 'hungry and broke' Tramp joining a circus, where he struggles to be funny on cue and falls for the cruel ringmaster's stepdaughter (Merna Kennedy). Perhaps more pertinently, the set-up spotlights Chaplin's identity crisis, touching on the pressures of always being the 'funny man'. Sounds a bit too meta? Fear not: watching Chaplin overcome anxieties via feats of panto-clowning is gloriously entertaining. Recalling his earlier forays into mime and movement, the pickpocketing and chase sequences are deliciously dexterous. The lion-cage set-piece is a miracle of timing, too, right down to the punchline (miaow).

Best of all, the Tramp's high-wire walk is a heart-in-mouth showcase of acrophobic agility, with added monkey trouble and metaphorical resonance. The framing narrative riffs on thwarted love, before a poignant final iris shot treads a fine line between despair and defiance: a balancing act Chaplin aces throughout. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE VERDICT A tragi-romantic triumph, Chaplin's 'forgotten' film is a feast of slapstick and self-awareness. Roll up!



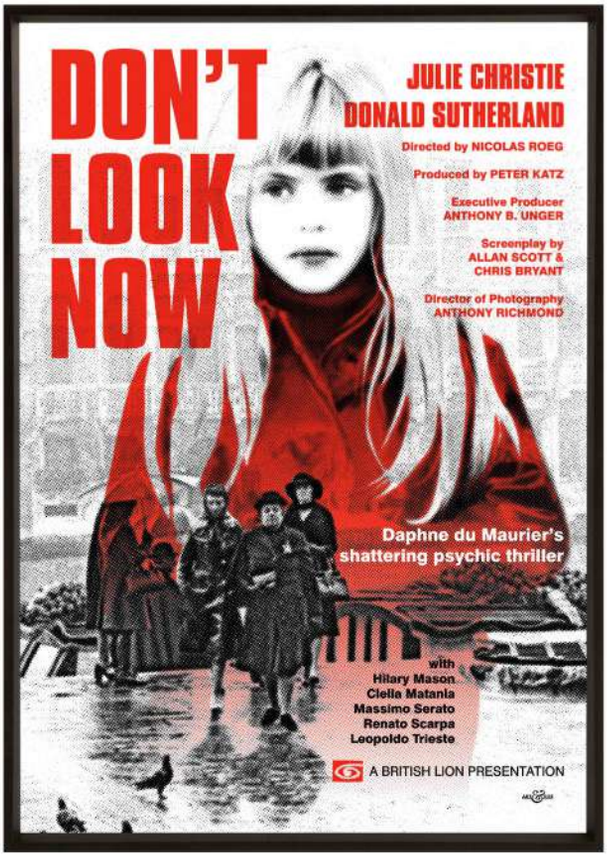
'Did I mention I loved your work in the MGM credits?'

EXTRAS

COLLECTIBLES

POP! VALENTINE CHOCOLATE OUT NOW

As a responsible organ (most of the time), it behoves *TF* to tell you not to shove the Dark (chocolate) Knight in your gob, as he's not actually edible. Modelled to look like the sweet stuff (foil wrappings and all), these vinyl bobbleheads stand approximately 10.4cm tall and make a deliciously geeky gifting option for Valentine's Day – even if you're just giving them to your own living room, where they can live safely without turning the mantelpiece into a lake of brown bubbles. Have a taste at funkoeurope.com.



COLLECTIBLE

LEGO T. REX SKULL OUT NOW

Though it's the first Lego *Jurassic World* set made for display rather than play, the centrepiece skull features an opening jaw, so there's fun to be had for amateur ventriloquists as well as palaeontologists. The 577-piece set also includes an information plaque, a footprint, a hidden 'amber' piece and a few spikes of foliage. The full exhibit measures an imposing H8xW7xD6.5in; see what the fossil is all about at lego.com. **MATTHEW LEYLAND**

PRINT

PAST LIVES FINE ART PRINT

OUT NOW

The movie that cracked *Total Film*'s top five of 2023 gets a fine-art print that captures its bittersweet delicacy (the film's, not *TF*'s). Nora and Hae Sung stand side by side while – tellingly – gazing in opposite directions in this watercolour stunner from Seoul-based illustrator Haam Juhae. With Na Kim's lettering adding to the warmth and class, it's printed in archival inks on cotton paper measuring 24 x 36 inches. It's a limited edition, so preempt any aching regrets by reaching out now to shop.a24films.com.

PRINT

DON'T LOOK NOW POP ART

OUT NOW

Looking to make a perfect pair with your *Wicker Man* print (see *Extras*, issue 345)? Then check out this reimagined poster for the movie that shared a classic double bill with *Wicker* in the UK back in '73. An official collab with StudioCanal, Art & Hue's pop-art print features a haunting halftone portrait of the tragic Christine in her iconic raincoat. Printed on museum-quality matte paper, the image is available in three sizes and 21 colour options, and is available on its own or paired with the *Wicker* poster, as the gods of cinema intended. Look now at artandhue.com.

ART © HUE, A24, LEGO, FUNKO

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Backstreet Boys – still looking good after all these years

CLASSIC TV

THE SOPRANOS

Pure therapy...

1999-2007 AVAILABLE ON DVD, BD, DIGITAL, SKY, NOW

Tony Soprano has it all: a loving family, a luxurious mansion and a lucrative career in (ahem) waste management. Yet there's a festering hole inside of Tony Soprano… and within the American dream itself, too.

'I'm a miserable prick,' Tony tells long-suffering therapist Doctor Melfi (Lorraine Bracco), speaking to a profound emptiness that cannot be filled, no matter how powerful he grows; an insatiable, self-destructive hunger that will ultimately be his downfall. For six seasons (and one prequel movie, 2021's *The Many Saints of Newark*), *The Sopranos* explored this dissatisfaction, pinpointing it to Tony's upbringing under his malignant mother (Nancy Marchand).

Creator and showrunner David Chase reportedly based the core idea on elements of his own life – the complicated relationship with his mother, and the uncompromising therapy sessions that followed. Originally pitching *The Sopranos* as a movie, he was convinced to reconceptualise, reinventing television in the process.

'I want to tell a story about the reality of being a mobster,' Chase told Salon.com. 'They aren't shooting each other every day. They sit around eating baked ziti and betting and figuring out who owes who money.' As it turns out, this apparently wasn't too far from the truth – with the Mob allegedly questioning whether they had a rat in their midst, feeding gossip to TV producers.

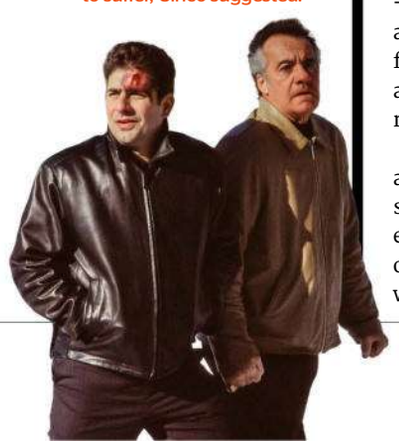
No small thanks to the late James Gandolfini's towering performance, the day-to-day life of Tony Soprano captures a unique blend of humour, drama and format-breaking storytelling. What's more, the flawed, paradoxical monster at the heart of the show anticipated the likes of Don Draper and Walter White by over a decade.

This world is fleshed out with an underworld of often comical associates: the unsettlingly strange Silvio Dante (Steven Van Zandt, who originally auditioned to play Tony), dimwit nephew Chris (Michael Imperioli) and the chilling Paulie Walnuts (Tony Sirico). Tony's home life is no less colourful, with wife Carmella (Edie Falco) more than capable of going toe-to-toe with her husband; the character was every bit as rich and textured. Meanwhile, daughter Meadow (Jamie-Lynn Sigler) keeps Tony on his toes as son A.J. (Robert Iler) struggles to grow up in the big man's shadow.

Its ending remains hotly debated: a controversial cut-to-black that defied expectation but rewarded anyone who had been paying attention ('You probably don't even hear it when it happens,' one character hints, ominously). The question of whether or not Tony met his maker is ultimately moot; *The Sopranos* will live on for decades. **JOEL HARLEY**

A VERY SPECIAL EPISODE

PINE BARRENS, S3, 2001
A hit goes awry when bickering odd couple Paulie and Chris lose their Russian target (and a shoe) in a desolate winter woodland. The first of four episodes directed by Steve Buscemi – who later played hot-tempered Tony Blundetto in S5 – this is *The Sopranos* at its most openly farcical. The Russian is lost to the woods, his fate left deliberately unclear by Chase. 'He wanted the audience to suffer,' Sirico suggested.



HBO

FRESH SPINS

Two gems to improve your moodle...

THE BOY AND THE HERON

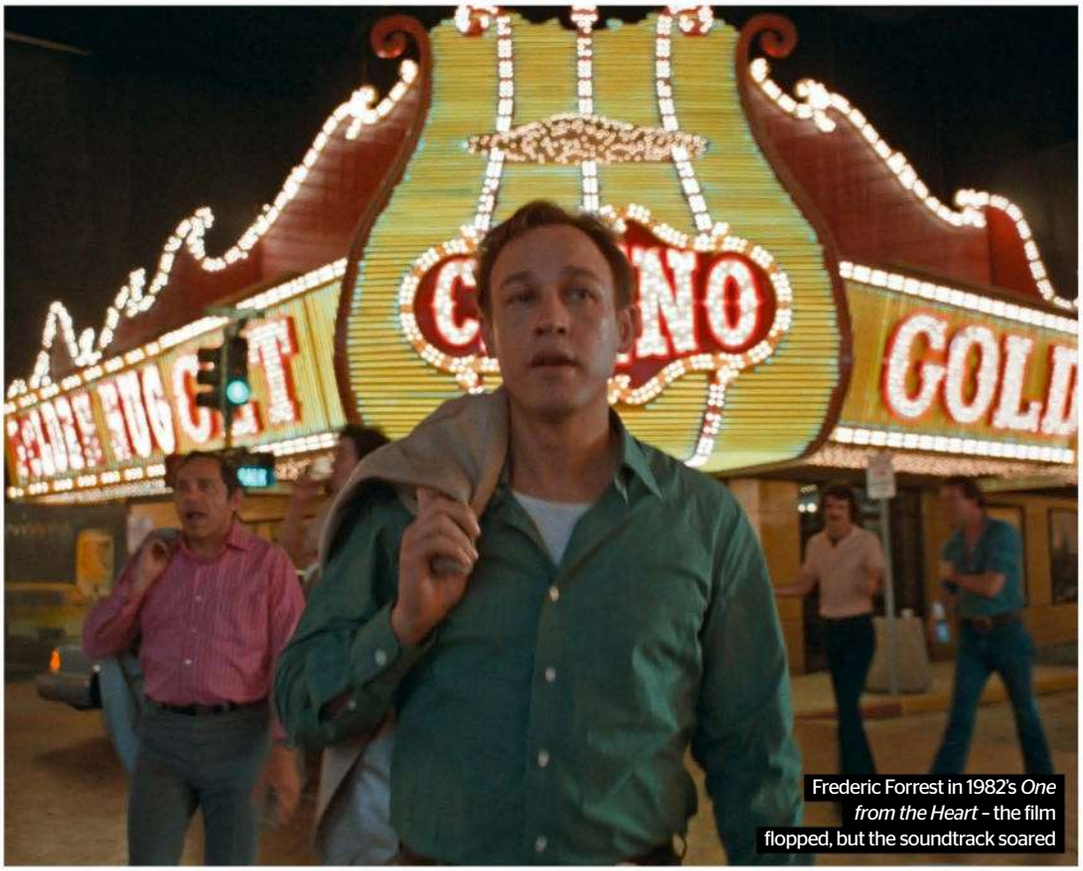
★★★★☆

Melancholy and minimalism are the key notes of Joe Hisaishi's Studio Ghibli return. Gentle piano notes dominate on *Ask Me Why*, setting the score's querulous tone. Cues such as *Farewell* and *Memories* are careful wonders, soft and inquisitive, any embellishments of strings and horns administered with pinpoint precision. As grander elements are added, Hisaishi builds steadily towards a sense of sweetly sorrowed finality with *The Last Smile*, its grace notes subtly, surely earned.

WONKA

★★★★★

After contributions to *Doctor Who*, *LOLA* and more, Neil Hannon brings winning reserves of wit and whimsy to Willy. *A Hatful of Dreams* makes exposition extravagant, while *Sweet Tooth* high-kicks off with showtune exuberance. Best of all, *For a Moment* and *A World of Your Own* render uplift and poignancy with ease. Timothée Chalamet's effortless vocals and Joby Talbot's twinkly score also charm, adding dustings of pure delight to Hannon's sweet, warm songs.



Frederic Forrest in 1982's *One from the Heart* – the film flopped, but the soundtrack soared

CLASSIC SOUNDTRACK

ONE FROM THE HEART

TOM WAITS SONY

Tom Waits was caught between stations in the early 80s. After his early beatnik balladeering, he was searching for new sounds, not yet in his junkyard-jazz phase. He veered between LA and New York, unsettled. So it fits that he would gravitate towards a Vegas of the mind, poised between reality and fantasy, as he worked on the soundtrack for Francis Ford Coppola's between-states – in/out of love – musical.

The 1982 film flopped, infamously, but Waits' music is a twinkling diamond in the wreckage. With country singer Crystal Gayle's limpid voice a perfect counterpoint to Waits' full-grain rasp'n'croon, *One from the Heart* is a liminal beauty, one part steam-off-the-sidewalk longing to two parts timeless showtunes.

Hired after Coppola heard his Bette Midler duet *I Never Talk to Strangers*, Waits spent nearly two years honing the songs in his smoke-wreathed American Zoetrope office. He was in Tin Pan Alley mode, a writer for hire. But his imprint rings out from the *Opening Montage*, a trio of tunes evoking his earlier *Tom Traubert's Blues* on Broadway.

Once Upon a Town establishes a merger of fairy tale and location, while *The Wages of Love*'s cracked swing brings together romance/gambling motifs. Through the smoky horns, Gayle's voice crystallises for the sublimely forlorn *Is There Any Way out of This Dream?*, where even Teddy Edwards' sax sounds desolate. *Picking up after You* finds Gayle/Waits parrying put-downs wittily, while Jack Sheldon's trumpet sulks in support.

Sung by Gayle, *Old Boyfriends* is one of Waits' grandest weepers, its soft bass and melting guitar backing a deep-blue valentine to lost squeezes. *Broken Bicycles* foregrounds Waits' fetish for damaged objects, invested with worlds of feeling over a wonky piano. *I Beg Your Pardon* is a scarecrow-blues apologia, *Little Boy Blue* a jazzy frolic. *The Tango* and *Circus Girl* preempt Waits' later experiments in woodwind wheeze, before the aching *This One's from the Heart* and purely beautiful *Take Me Home* uphold Waits' peerless ability to turn bruised sentiment into something sublime.

The songs banked Waits an Oscar nom; he lost to Henry Mancini and Leslie Bricusse's *Victor/Victoria*. No shame in that, and nor is the loss any shade on Waits' intoxicating toasts to sloshed yearning and moon-eyed melancholy. Notably, too, Waits met future wife/collaborator/saviour Kathleen Brennan on the job, imbuing the record with extra romance for long-haul Waits-watchers. The result is an exquisite act of excavation: from uncertainty and flawed ambition, Waits sourced scuffed romantic gold. **KEVIN HARLEY**

STUDIOCANAL, WATERTOWER MUSIC, STUDIO GHIBLI

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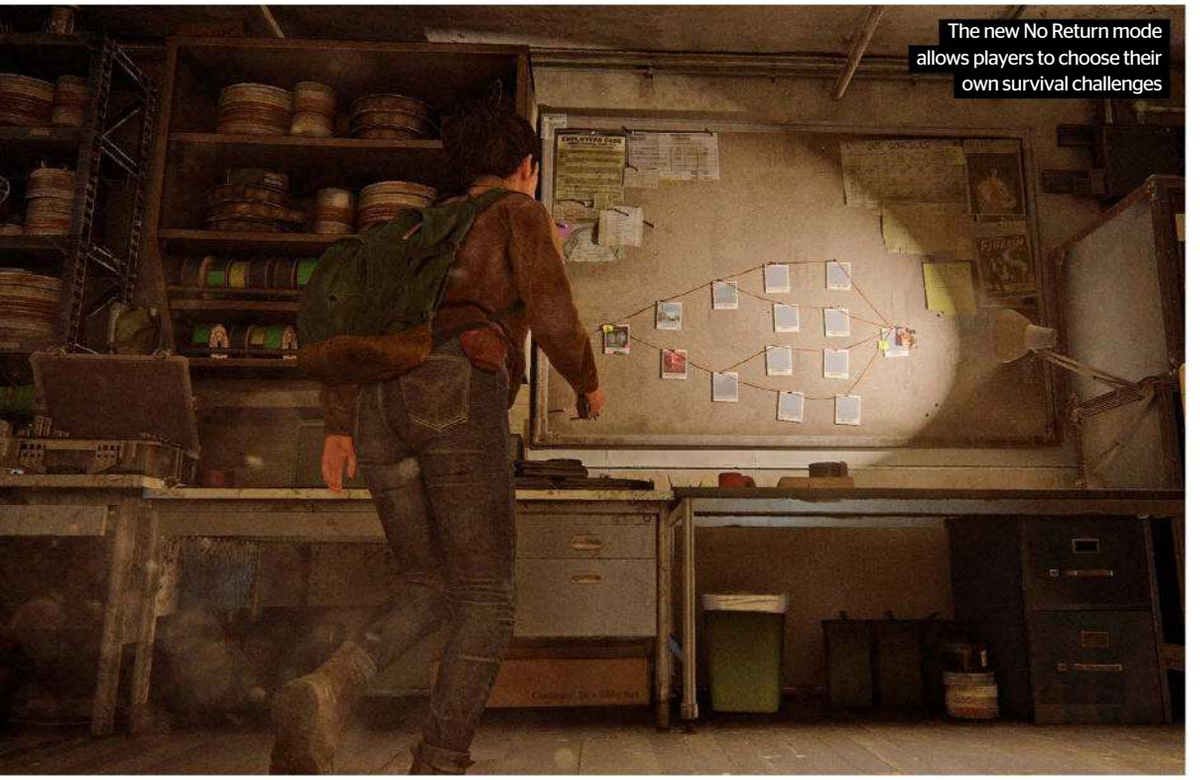

The new No Return mode allows players to choose their own survival challenges

GAMES

THE LAST OF US PART II REMASTERED

Ellie evolved...

★★★★★ **OUT NOW** PS5

The recent cancellation of Naughty Dog's long-awaited *The Last of Us* multiplayer game – after several years in development – highlights the difficulties of developing blockbuster video games for modern consoles. So, too, does the release of this new version of a game that only recently celebrated its third anniversary. The cutting-edge late-PS4-era title receives a number of visual enhancements on PS5, but it says much about the narrowing leaps between hardware generations that most who played the 2020 sequel will barely notice.

It's best considered as the interactive equivalent of a Criterion Collection release: an acclaimed work presented with superior image quality alongside a host of bonus features. Three playable deleted sequences have been included, in their unfinished 'pre-alpha' form with commentary explaining their origins and why they were cut – pacing purposes, mainly – just months from completion. From a party scene to a sewer escape and a boar hunt, they're an insightful peek inside the development process (spare a thought, too, for Banun Idris, the lead game designer behind two of these excised sections).

A new mode, No Return, will be the biggest draw for most players. Here, you're pitched into a series of short skirmishes, which take place in repurposed environments from the main game – in one, you might have to survive against growing numbers of Infected against the clock, before hunting down three groups of Seraphites in the next. Between encounters you'll spend rewards upgrading your skills and arsenal at your hideout, where you can pick the next challenge via a pinboard of Polaroids, linked by branching red threads. To increase the peril, you only have a single life to complete a run – though unlockable characters, modifiers and more ease the pain of starting all over again.

These encounters are every bit as brutal as the main game, if not more disturbing still in this context. Characters will react with disgust to the horrifying results of their own handiwork, even as they sprint to a supply cache to stock up on ammo or leave items in a dropbox in exchange for a bonus upon their return to the hideout. Much as it highlights the strengths of the main game's tense, desperate combat, the looping structure seems to undercut its narrative message about cyclical violence. Then again, it might just be the perfect way to reflect the story's powerful (if bleak) tale of characters using lethal force by choice rather than necessity. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

2 MORE

Recent thumb-twiddlers...

ANOTHER CODE: RECOLLECTION

★★★★★

OUT NOW SWITCH

Best known for cult Nintendo DS favourite *Hotel Dusk*, defunct Japanese studio Cing also made these two puzzle-led adventures, in which teenager Ashley digs into her family's mysterious past. Their strong narrative focus and introspective tone have since come into vogue; too late to save Cing, but this expansively upgraded duology is worth rediscovering.

RESIDENT EVIL 4 REMAKE

★★★★★

OUT NOW IPHONE

Publishers hoping to bring their biggest games to mobile may struggle to persuade an audience used to microtransactions to stump up a premium fee upfront. But the tech convinces: on a high-end Apple device, the visuals aren't far off console quality; as such, the novelty of playing something *this* handsome on a phone never quite wears off.

TECH PREVIEW

From transparent TVs to luxurious leather headphones...

This Jan, the annual Las Vegas-based Consumer Electronics Show (CES) returned to being a fully fledged in-person event. And there was plenty of home-cinema kit filling Sin City's convention-centre halls. Here's our pick of the tech coming your way in '24...

LG SIGNATURE OLED T

OUT TBC £TBC

LG wowed the CES crowds with the world's first wireless transparent OLED TV. Sporting a genuinely futuristic look, the see-through 4K panel works as a transparent display for photos or artwork, and can turn opaque when you actually want to watch something. And since it blends into its environment when turned off, there's no need to stick it in the corner. What's more, the clever wireless Zero Connect Box sits next to the plug socket, so you don't have to position the TV by the wall either (if you're got space to keep a 77-inch telly in the middle of the room, that is).

PANASONIC Z95A OLED

OUT TBC 2024 £TBC

For its new flagship TV, Panasonic has cleverly ditched its own smart-TV interface in favour of Amazon's Fire OS. As such, you'll enjoy quality on a par with Amazon's excellent streaming sticks. Available in 55 and 65in, the panels pack a clever new processor that uses AI for better streaming picture quality. Dolby Vision IQ Precision works with the TV's built-in sensors to alter light levels across the screen for top-notch brightness, without losing any of the detail on those moody movies that are often hard to make out. As with the maker's previous top TV models, this one's been colour-tuned by Hollywood colourist Stefan Sonnenfeld (*Top Gun: Maverick*, *Wonder Woman*, *The White Lotus)* and also features Alexa voice control.

AUDIO PRO C20

OUT TBC FEBRUARY £450

This stylish all-in-one speaker from the Swedish audio brand is designed for both TV and music, so it's a great choice if you're limited on space. Sporting an ice-cool Scandi design, the C20 has an ARC input, which means you can get audio output via HDMI, cutting down on the number of unsightly cables you need. You can also plug it directly into your turntable, or stream from the likes of Spotify and Tidal. What's more, the C20 can be paired, so you can use two for a stereo setup.

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DALI IO-12

OUT NOW £999

If you want to really push the boat out for on-the-go movie watching, check out these stunning headphones, which use the same tech as the maker's high-end speakers for crystal-clear sound with no distortion. They're also ideal for teaming up with mobile gadgets, connecting via USB-C or Bluetooth. A luxurious leather headband and oversized square-shaped ear cups mean they're super-comfy, too. True, they cost a bomb, but that hasn't stopped us adding them to our wish list…

SAMSUNG NEO QLED 8K

OUT TBC £TBC

Samsung is going all in on artificial intelligence with its new TV range. AI-powered features include the ability to upscale content to ultra-high 8K resolution, along with an AI motion enhancer (particularly useful if you're into sports movies, or sports per se). An AI-driven depth enhancer detects the part of the scene your eye would naturally focus on, bringing it to the foreground for a more lifelike, three-dimensional picture. On top of all that, the panel is just 12.9mm deep, and will hit the shelves in a range of screen sizes.

SENNHEISER ACCENTUM PLUS

OUT 20 FEBRUARY £199.99

A relatively affordable option for mobile movie watching, these Bluetooth cans from the ever-reliable Sennheiser give you an impressive 50 hours of listening time per charge. Adaptive noise-cancelling continually adjusts to any nearby clamour, so you can watch films in peace. Meanwhile, touch-control earcups mean you can quickly pause and play without having to search for the buttons. Available in black or white.

TCL 115QM89

OUT TBC £TBC

Rapidly growing in popularity thanks to its feature-packed TVs at genuinely affordable prices, TCL has introduced a gigantic 115in panel that might cost just a tad more than its usual bargains. The enormous 115QM89 features a Mini LED backlight split up into an unprecedented 20,000 dimming zones, sure to provide excellent contrast across that massive screen. It also has a crazy-high brightness level of 5,000 'nits', which should make for an excellent mini-home cinema screen if you have the room (and cash). A built-in 6.2.2-channel speaker system with upward-firing speakers for Dolby Atmos immersive audio completes the package.

LG CINEBEAM QUBE 4K

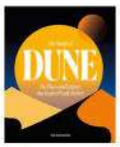
OUT TBC £TBC

Transform your living room into a mini-cinema with this cool ultra-portable projector, which rocks a decidedly retro vibe. While the CineBeam Qube is confusingly not cube-shaped, its distinctive 360-degree rotatable handle doubles as both a carrying handle and a stand for extra stability when the projector is in place. You can project 4K images measuring up to 120 inches, with easy access to all the usual streaming services. The projector automatically adjusts image placement and size to get the best picture. **LIBBY PLUMMER**

LG, SAMSUNG, AUDIO PRO, PANASONIC, DALI, TCL, SENNHEISER

2 MORE

Tunnelling worms and moving castles...



THE WORLDS OF DUNE

★★★★★

Film journalist Tom Huddleston hails Frank Herbert's *Dune* as 'probably the most widely read sci-fi novel in history... without doubt the most influential'. Here, he deep-dives into the landmark tome's own influences (from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*). With Huddleston glossing over the movies by David Lynch and Denis Villeneuve (and Jodorowsky's aborted adaptation), this scrupulously researched effort is very much geared to those eager to unpick the original text's daunting density. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

STUDIO GHIBLI

★★★★★

Updated to include *The Boy and the Heron*, this fourth edition of Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc's beginner's guide covers everything from the early work of the studio's two figureheads (Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata) to other projects and co-productions, alongside brisk overviews of every Ghibli release and the themes that bind them. Keen followers of animation won't find anything too surprising here, but for those new to Ghibli – and the box-office numbers for Miyazaki's latest suggest there will be a few – this is a good place to start. **CHRIS SCHILLING**

Coen places: Cage in *Raising Arizona*

BOOKS

HOW COPPOLA BECAME CAGE

★★★★★ **ZACH SCHONFELD** OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

How do you sum up an actor like Nicolas Cage? Wisely, journalist Zach Schonfeld doesn't try to capture the whole kaleidoscope in one volume, instead zeroing in on the early years. Working up to perhaps the peak of Cage's career to date, 1995's *Leaving Las Vegas* – the film that won him an Oscar – this study of the movies that shaped the star ends before he morphed into an action hero in *The Rock*.

Smartly, this avoids the need to plough through Cage's later CV, which may be peppered with occasional brilliance (*Adaptation*, *Mandy* and the recent *Dream Scenario*) but is also filled with a lot of dross. Instead, Schonfeld rewinds to Cage's childhood as part of the Coppola clan, tracing the influence of James Dean on the impressionable teen, as he considers an actor who for the past four decades has 'absorb[ed] peculiar influences like a Dustbuster gone berserk'.

Though Cage declined to participate in the book, leaving something of a gap, Schonfeld does interview myriad collaborators (David Lynch, Elizabeth Shue, Mike Figgis, Amy Heckerling...), allowing him to cover cult classics (including *Wild at Heart*, *Raising Arizona* and *Vampire's Kiss*) in surprising depth. Thorough, considered and entertainingly written, this is a valiant effort to rescue Cage from being the one-man meme machine he's become in recent years. **JAMES MOTTRAM**

ALFRED HITCHCOCK STORYBOARDS

★★★★★

TONY LEE MORAL TITAN

The night classes in life drawing that Hitch took as a young man at the University of London served him well in his directing career, giving him the tools to convey precisely what he wanted before a single frame was filmed. Moral's fourth book on the Leytonstone legend draws on storyboards from nine classics – including *Psycho*, *The Birds* and *The 39 Steps* – to celebrate both his meticulous pre-planning and his unmatched mastery of cinematic composition. **NEIL SMITH**

SCREEN DEEP

★★★★★

ELLEN E. JONES FABER & FABER

Subtitled *How film and TV can solve racism and save the world*, journalist Jones' critical yet hopeful study shows how screen stories can enforce and – potentially – dismantle white privilege. Jones navigates a history of cultural racism assiduously, ranging from *The Birth of a Nation* to blackface in sharp, brisk prose. Interviews and insight are deployed to explore how change might occur: from the Sunken Place to *Small Axe*, Jones reveals how our viewing could expand our empathies and expose structural prejudice. **KEVIN HARLEY**

THE FATAL ALLIANCE: A CENTURY OF WAR ON FILM

★★★★★

DAVID THOMSON HARPERCOLLINS

Thomson's latest takes 1914 as its starting point, 'as world war and world cinema came into being in the same burst of change'. This eloquent observation is followed by more provocative ones, Thomson arguing that film tends to trivialise global wars, and that America had a more marginalised role in them than it likes to think. And that's in just the first two pages. This articulate analysis stimulates and challenges, even as it skips wildly between case studies. **MATT LOOKER**

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. TITAN. FABER & FABER. HARPERCOLLINS. FRANCES LINCOLN. KAMERA BOOKS. TWENTIETH CENTURY STUDIOS

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TOTAL FILM

BUFF

CINEMA CELEBRATED AND DEBATED. BOOSTING YOUR MOVIE GENIUS TO SUPERHERO LEVELS...

IS IT BOLLOCKS?

Film Buff investigates the facts behind outlandish movie plots.

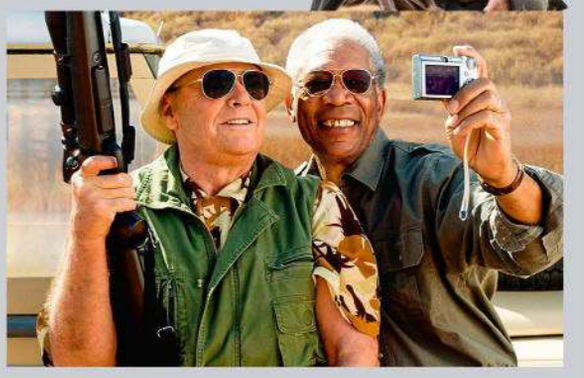
Q Could apes ever really learn to talk as they do in the Planet of the Apes movies?

Philip Lieberman, a cognitive scientist at Brown University, used models of the vocal tracts of primates to explore whether speech was physiologically possible for monkeys and apes. He determined that they would be unable to talk because their vocal tracts are shorter than those of humans, which evolved over time due to upright walking. But evolutionary biologist and cognitive scientist William Tecumseh Sherman Fitch III, from the University of Vienna, ascertained in his research that apes *could* speak but just not in the way that humans do, because they would be unable to create vowel sounds. More recently, Dieter Steklis, a professor at the University of Arizona, and his wife Netzin, a lecturer at the same institution, researched vocalisation capabilities and concluded that 'the idea that you just have to make the ape smarter and it will speak is not a credible scenario'. Though monkeys and apes have the neurological capacity to vocalise, they lack certain neurological specialisations that humans have for language and speech production. That's not to say that apes are unable to communicate with humans – chimpanzees have successfully used a gestural language (a form of American Sign Language) to 'talk' to humans, and a bonobo ape called Kanzi was able to use keyboard symbols to communicate. But speaking full sentences and holding a conversation? Nope. And according to Netzin, it's unlikely they could learn to ride horses either.

VERDICT BOLLOCKS

ALTERNATIVE BOX OFFICE

The biggest movies... WITH SANDY TITLES



01	**TRUE GRIT** 2010	$252.3M
02	**THE BUCKET LIST** 2007	$175.4M
03	**THE BOX** 2009	$33.3M
04	**ASK THE DUST** 2006	$2.5M
05	**THE CASTLE** 1997	$0.9M
06	**BURYING THE EX** 2014	$0.7M
07	**THE QUEEN OF SPADES** 2016	$0.5M
08	**DIG!** 2004	$0.2M
09	**GRAIN** 2017	$0.07M
10	**SINK** 2015	$0.07M

ON LOCATION REEL SPOTS BEHIND THE CAMERA

WHAT? In *Battleship Potemkin*, citizens cheering on rebels are driven down the steps of Odessa by a line of firing Cossacks. A baby carriage rolls down the stairs...
WHERE? The Potemkin Stairs, Odessa, Ukraine.
GO? In more peaceful times, this flight of 192 steps, officially known as the Primorsky Stairs, is a major tourist attraction for reenactments of the famous scene. No prams, mind...

ALAMY, 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

Want us to investigate if a movie scenario is bollocks or snapped yourself at a film location? Contact us at totalfilm@futurenet.com

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TWINS IN MOVIES

Double trouble...

1

THE SHINING

Even for a haunted hotel packed to the rafters with blood-filled elevators, monstrous old ladies and a scenery-chewing Jack Nicholson, nothing is as creepy as Delbert Grady's dead daughters, come to enlist little Danny Torrance as their eternal playmate.

2

AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON

Pietro and Wanda Maximoff (Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Elizabeth Olsen) ran rings around the Avengers in their first appearance, before ultimately (and temporarily, for Pietro) joining the team. Wanda's more recent behaviour proved that she was always the scary one.

3

TWINS

Action hero Arnold Schwarzenegger broke out of the mould with his first major comedy, starring opposite Danny DeVito, who played his chaotic test-tube twin, Vincent (all the remaining 'genetic garbage'). Their electric chemistry proved Arnie was no one-trick pony.

4

THE PRESTIGE

Magician Alfred Borden (Christian Bale) baffles audiences and rivals with his teleporting trick, but the explanation is devilishly simple. Director Christopher Nolan's greatest sleight of hand reveals the truth – Alfred's twin, waiting in the wings to complete the illusion.

5

HARRY POTTER

Brothers James and Oliver Phelps were cast as mischievous scene-stealers Fred and George Weasley after skipping school to audition. Much later, Oliver grew so upset filming Fred's death scene that he could only complete five takes. James, meanwhile, fell asleep.

6

DEAD RINGERS

For playing the icy gynaecologists of David Cronenberg's psychological thriller, star Jeremy Irons was given two dressing rooms – one for each Mantle brother he portrayed. He ultimately used only one of them, believing that the twins' eerie inseparability was the whole point.

7

THE PARENT TRAP

Lindsay Lohan shone in her movie debut, playing estranged twins and stepmother botherers Annie and Hallie. She later revisited the theme – playing long-lost twins again, but now caught in the trap, rather than setting one – in the altogether nastier *I Know Who Killed Me*.

8

ADAPTATION

Nicolas Cage won acclaim playing opposite himself as Charlie Kaufman and his fictitious brother, Donald – personifying real-life Kaufman's frustration at a bout of writer's block. Cage's own brother stepped in during filming, giving the star someone to bounce off.

9

SISTERS

Brian De Palma brought signature flair to this thriller, using split screen to explore the fractured yet inextricably linked relationship of once-conjoined twins Danielle and Dominique (Margot Kidder). We'll never look at a birthday cake the same way again.

10

STAR WARS

On top of the Alderaan-shattering revelation that his father is intergalactic fascist Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) discovers that he has a twin sister in Leia (Carrie Fisher). Happier news, but don't mention that kiss in *A New Hope*. JOEL HARLEY

ALAMY

Did we miss something? Let us know on @totalfilm

CAR FOR SALE

FILM: THELMA & LOUISE
VEHICLE: FORD THUNDERBIRD
YEAR: 1966

1966 Ford Thunderbird with turquoise paint job and white interior, previously owned by two wilfully careless female drivers. V8 cylinders to overtake any trucker and an expansive backseat for hot hitchhikers. A perfect vehicle for those seeking desert vistas, Mexican jaunts and road trips from Arkansas. A ride so thrilling you'll feel like you're flying… Some restoration after canyon crash but good to go for friends on a journey. Contact FBI agent Hal Slocumb for details.

REEL ESTATE

FOR SALE Gorgeous rustic log cabin with sweeping South Dakota prairie views and a bucolic swimming pond. The undulating grasslands of Sage Creek Wilderness Area are a short ride away and the cabin boasts basic amenities: open fire, no plumbing, resident wolf. A perfect off-the-grid place to escape modern life and heartache, and experience 'the frontier'. Prospective owners will require own horse and interest in neighbouring wildlife and people. Please apply to Fort Hays for billeting.

FLOP CULTURE

THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

Frank Darabont's Stephen King riff tanked 30 years ago. Did it lose in the name game, or did the competition pulp it?

Why it was a good idea (on paper)

Stephen King flexed his writerly powers with his largely non-horror novellas collection *Different Seasons*. With Morgan Freeman and a post-*Player* Tim Robbins leading, could tyro writer/director Frank Darabont's adaptation of prison story *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* do King proud?

What went wrong?

Freeman and Robbins loved the script. The title? Not so much. Even with 'Rita Hayworth' dropped to dodge expectations of a biopic, both claimed viewers were confused by the moniker. True or not, perhaps the decision to downplay King's name in promo materials didn't help - King's brand name might have ignited curiosity even on a non-horror tip. Another *King* (*Lion* variety) was 1994's big box-office winner, though *Forrest Gump* was *Shawshank*'s closer competitor and outright victor in the 'grown-up drama' stakes. Then came *Pulp Fiction*, cornering the adult market with the lure of illicit pleasures. Big Mac or porridge? Go figure. True, *Shawshank* had minor internal issues: Tom Cruise departed when Rob Reiner bequeathed the film to Darabont; DoP Roger Deakins argued with Darabont over external prison shots; Freeman wouldn't do multiple takes. But the big challenge was how to sell *Shawshank*'s vintage pleasures in a game-changing year, a challenge perhaps compounded by a lack of female roles and the tricky-sell prison-pic genre. Despite healthy reviews, Andy's great escape failed to chip out a clear route to box-office nirvana.

Redeeming feature

Like Red and Andy's friendship, *Shawshank* burns slow and sure. Adjust to the old-lags rhythm and you're in for life.

What happened next?

Multiple awards nominations confirmed *Shawshank*'s quality, while VHS and screenings on Ted Turner's TNT proved the point. Prime spots in 'best films ever' lists followed, as did fan pilgrimages to the Ohio prison site and a redemptive King prison pic from Darabont: 1999's *The Green Mile*.

Should it be remade?

No good thing ever dies… For pure cathartic uplift, just revisit the living, breathing original instead. **KEVIN HARLEY**

BUDGET	BOX OFFICE	AWARDS	TF STAR RATING	ROTTEN TOMATOES
$25m	$28.9m	1	★★★★	91%

CASTLE ROCK ENTERTAINMENT

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Is 2008's *Speed Racer* (Emile Hirsch in the title role, pictured) in need of reassessment?

IS IT JUST ME OR WAS SPEED RACER AHEAD OF ITS TIME?

JACOB HEAYES
@HEYIMJAY_COB

Summer 2008 saw two tentpole adaptations go head to head: *Iron Man* and *Speed Racer*, both of which unexpectedly shaped today's cinematic landscape. Releasing a week after the MCU's debut certainly didn't do *Speed Racer* any favours; nevertheless, it's the latter film that has arguably prevailed as the more prescient of the two.

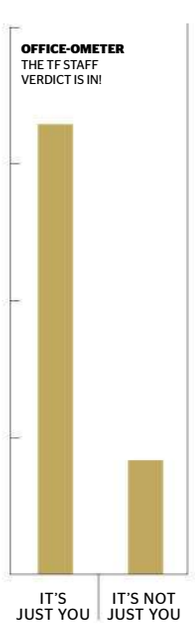
Speed Racer wastes little time in plunging audiences into its death-defying neon circuits and rapid-fire storytelling. Indeed, the Wachowskis barely wait for the chequered flag of the opening credits to settle before making their bold statement of intent. The opening race encapsulates the film's resonant qualities: scintillating colours, dynamic compositions and unabashed melodrama (Speed Racer's desire to live up to his late brother's legacy provides the emotional heft).

As modern blockbusting awkwardly expands from shared universes to multiverses, *Speed Racer* remains a great example of how to integrate inspirations from across different media without losing coherence. Tatsuo Yoshida's original manga (and subsequent anime) is the key influence, but the Wachowskis also evoke everything from *F-Zero*'s adrenaline rush, *Dragon Ball*'s lively choreography and the infectious enthusiasm of eSports coverage.

I should also address the elephant (or rather pet chimp) in the room: the all-consuming visual effects. *Speed Racer* avoids leaning into conventionally slick CGI; there's a hint of *LazyTown* to its hyperreal digital environments, an aesthetic that eerily anticipates today's Volume-shot productions. While the technology has undeniably evolved since 2008, these modern movies/shows often falter in a key area: clarity of expression. In embracing artifice, *Speed Racer* triumphs in conjuring up a sense of transportation (ahem) absent from its uncanny-valley successors.

The Wachowskis' filmography is packed with prophetic works. Red/blue pills and simulation glitches are part of today's online vernacular. And yet, as much as it feels like we're now living in the Matrix, we're still catching up to *Speed Racer*'s drift… or is it just me?

Share your reaction at gamesradar.com/totalfilm or on Facebook and X/Twitter.



WARNER BROS., BBC

LAST TIME IS ALAN PARTRIDGE COMEDY KING?

James Hilton
Mostly, but not always. His live show *Stratagem* was very poor.

Kage Devereux
No, it's just you.

Steve Hoar
Paul(ine) Calf is better, IMHO.

Paul W
Love the TV/book stuff, but the less said about the Partridge movie [2013's *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*], the better!

Katie Nunn
Totally not just you. My eternal comedy go-to.

Celebrating the standout stock characters in movies...

TAKING STOCK

THE EMOTIONLESS KILLER

WORDS **PAUL TANTER**

Anyone who has woken, sweating, from a nightmare where something sinister is chasing you knows the fear of the emotionless, ruthless killer that just keeps going, like an evil Energizer Bunny.

It doesn't matter where or how fast you run; it will find you. A distinct character type from the serial killer or slasher, these aren't your standard horror fare. They'll have a reason, a mission, maybe even their own code of ethics. But it's useless trying to appeal to their better nature for mercy. These antagonists are incapable of sympathy and will single-mindedly see their plans through to the bitter end, while remaining coldly indifferent.

Whether artificial, supernatural or just plain human with a big old dollop of psychopathy, *Buff* celebrates the movie menaces who can't be bargained with, can't be reasoned with, don't feel pity, or remorse, or fear... and absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead!

ALAMY

ANTON CHIGURH

JAVIER BARDEM, NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN (2007)

From the moment he silently manoeuvres his handcuffs to his front and uses them to strangle a hapless police officer to death, the Coens' bizarrely haired psychopath is a terrifying and seemingly unstoppable ruthless killer. He's a man without vanity (see the hair), but with his own set of horrific principles that see him commit murder rather than break his word. 'The challenge was to create this person who would feel nothing,' said Bardem of the man who lets a coin toss decide people's fate. 'In the gas station scene, I was always thinking there was a superior voice that was making a decision through me,' he mused on the performance that rightfully earned him 2008's Oscar for Best Supporting Actor. Pigeons should beware his drive-by target practice.

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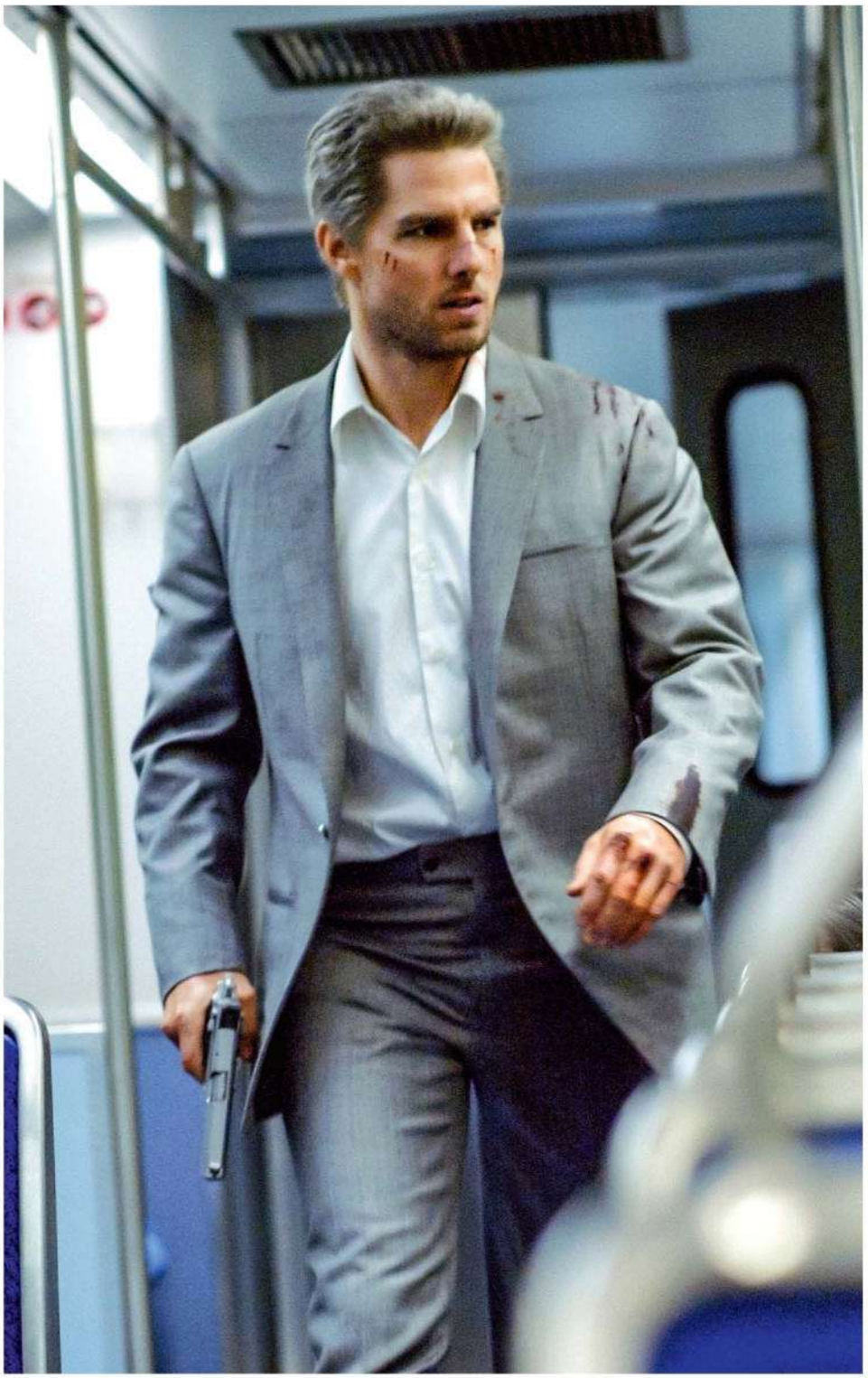
TAKING STOCK

T-800
ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, THE TERMINATOR (1984)

A literal killing machine purpose-built to seek out and eliminate targets. Whether it's leaping through flames to punch through a windshield or as a titanium endoskeleton, the cyborg is the stuff of classic nightmares: in fact, the image of a chrome skeleton emerging through flames came to writer/director James Cameron in a fever dream. As time-traveller Kyle Reese explains in the classic 'It can't be bargained with' speech, it's never going to stop until its mission is complete and you're worm food. Originally auditioning for Reese, Arnie was so full of suggestions for the now-iconic character that he talked himself into the role. He took inspiration from Yul Brynner's android in *Westworld*, down to keeping his eyes on the target while reloading his weapons.

HEADLESS HORSEMAN
CHRISTOPHER WALKEN, SLEEPY HOLLOW (1999)

A European mercenary who came to the US 'for the love of carnage', the Horseman was decapitated with his own sword and buried, planting a 'seed of evil' in the woods he now haunts. He stalks the village on his horse, picking off inhabitants and keeping their heads. 'I play disturbed people a lot,' Walken has noted, and this is no exception. With piercing blue eyes and teeth filed down to sharpened points, he has a demonic, otherworldly feel in a dialogue-free role (not counting snarling). But he's not just a swinging sword; he's smart, too. When the townsfolk take refuge in a church, he improvises a harpoon from a fence post to skewer and snatch Baltus Van Tassel (Michael Gambon).



VINCENT
TOM CRUISE, COLLATERAL (2004)

Michael Mann's training for Cruise in preparation for playing the ice-cool hitman ranged from mock-assassination exercises to having the A-lister briefly pretend to be a FedEx courier to test if he could blend into a crowd. The effort paid off, with a performance that confirms Cruise should branch out more often from his safer blockbusters, and play bad guys. A manipulative assassin with a mission to eliminate five grand-jury witnesses in one night, Vincent is a charismatic, methodical professional with a penchant for improvising and adapting to the environment, who co-opts Jamie Foxx's unfortunate taxi driver into ferrying him from job to job. He's matter-of-factly philosophical and single-minded, and bends people and circumstances to his will.

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DR. MANHATTAN
BILLY CRUDUP, WATCHMEN (2009)

Psychopaths are often described as having a 'God complex' – the belief that they are invincible and superior to other people, and that they know everything. A nuclear accident transforms Crudup's doctor Jon Osterman into all this and more. An omnipotent being walking among mere mortals, Dr. Manhattan becomes detached from his emotions and disconnected from humanity. The superhero finds humans as boring as termites, while also considering the living and the dead to be of equal value, since the atoms in both remain the same. It's this bleakly objective view – plus the ability to manipulate matter – that enables him to win the Vietnam War for the US by eviscerating the Viet Cong and hastening its surrender. Even his fellow Watchmen aren't safe, with Rorschach (Jackie Earle Haley) suffering the same grisly fate.

AGENT SMITH
HUGO WEAVING, THE MATRIX (1999)

Cold, emotionless AI turning on humans has fascinated (and terrified) audiences ever since HAL refused to open the pod-bay doors in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Pipping the millennium, evil algorithm Smith's defining look involved a suit, sunglasses and an earpiece. A computer program whose only real feeling is a disgust for humankind, believing it to be 'a disease, a cancer of this planet', Smith exudes natural power. He can dodge bullets, jump buildings and morph into any person. Plus, horrifyingly, he can make your mouth disappear so you can't even scream for help. Weaving wanted Smith to be not robotic, but not really human, and always kept in mind the style of 1950s newsreaders, with co-star Laurence Fishburne comparing him to Walter Cronkite.

AZAZEL
ELIAS KOTEAS, FALLEN (1998)

At first he seems to be a murderer on death row, named Edgar Reese – but once justice is served in the gas chamber, Azazel's true nature is revealed; he's a fallen angel in spirit form, several thousand years old and cursed to wander the Earth without form. Terrifyingly, he's capable of moving from person to person via touch, controlling their bodies and gaining their knowledge. The satanic demon's ability means he could be anyone as he resumes his killing spree while turning Detective John Hobbes (Denzel Washington) from the hunter into the hunted, goading the cop into shooting people he possesses, then jumping into a new host. Handily (spoilers), he can also possess animals when necessary, making dispatching him nigh-on impossible. Don't trust a soul.

MISTER SHHH
STEVE BUSCEMI, THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD (1995)

One of 90s Miramax's post-*Pulp Fiction* attempts to capture the same cool, this is largely overlooked but worth revisiting for Buscemi's turn as a hitman brought in to serve a 'buckwheat' death on Jimmy 'The Saint' (Andy Garcia) and his crew, involving a bullet where the sun doesn't shine. Impassive and emotionless while besting opponents in street fights and shoot-outs, Buscemi plays against audience expectations of his usual seedy wise-crackers with a near-silent character who 'won't say three words unless you beg him'. And he's described in hushed tones as 'the most lethal contract killer west of the Mississippi', with over 200 kills to his name. Proof that danger comes in all shapes and sizes.

ALAMY

TOTAL FILM RETROSPECTIVE

Lone Star

Buff pins on a badge and tracks down writer/director John Sayles to investigate his 90s masterpiece...

WORDS **JAMIE GRAHAM**

In the late-70s, when Lewis Teague was shooting creature feature *Alligator*, its writer, John Sayles, took a day trip to the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas. Outside the Alamo Church, picketers urged visitors (over 1.6m a year) to not so readily accept the American version of events being preached. This version – a celebration of how former Tennessee congressman Davy Crockett and a small band of men heroically held out, and ultimately sacrificed themselves, against an army of evil Mexicans – is a proud moment in Texan and American history. It's taught in schools and can be seen in the John Wayne western *The Alamo*.

'Print the legend' goes the line in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. But Sayles got to wondering about how it always seems to be the victors who get to write up the history books. Some 18 years later, he poured all of his research into the Oscar-nominated *Lone Star* (1996), a masterful western/detective story that ends with one character saying, 'Forget the Alamo.'

'Legends are used for: "This is who we are, this is how we became, this is how we got our land,"' says Sayles with a rueful smile. A founding father of the American independent scene in the 80s and 90s, his socially conscious, politically engaged body of work includes such classics as *The Return of the Secaucus 7*, *Matewan* and *Eight Men Out*. *Lone Star* is his masterpiece. 'Legends are usually

ALAMY, WARNER BROS.

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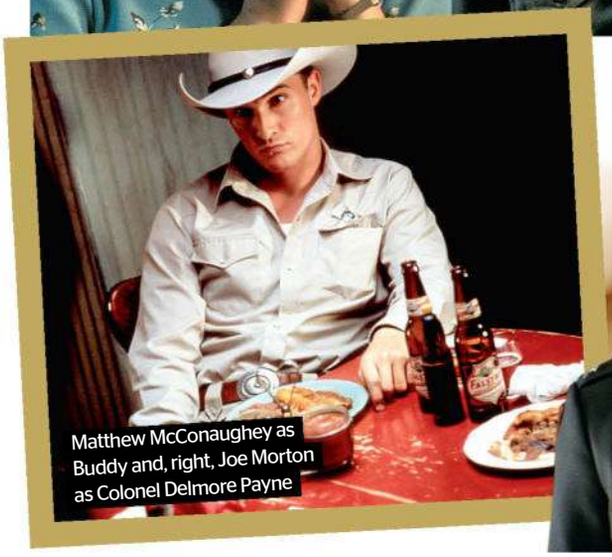
Nightclub owner Otis (Ron Canada) and grandson Chet (Eddie Robinson)

Teacher Pilar (Elizabeth Peña) and sheriff Sam (Chris Cooper) share a complicated history



Matthew McConaughey as Buddy and, right, Joe Morton as Colonel Delmore Payne

based on something that happened but they're not necessarily the truth. When the legend starts to become destructive rather than constructive, what do we do with it? Do we throw it out, do we modify it? In the United States today, there's all these monuments to Confederate generals. In most of the southern states, they finally don't fly the stars and bars [flag], which to white southerners, for many years, was a point of pride. To Black southerners and Black people in general in the United States, that's the Nazi flag.'

Filmed in the border town of Eagle Pass and along the Rio Grande, *Lone Star* uses a murder mystery to unearth the region's storied history ('The War of Texas Independence, the US-Mexican war, the dirty war between Texas rangers and Mexican community…' says Sayles) and the racial tensions in this melting pot of ethnicities. The murdered man is 'bribes 'n' bullets' sheriff Charlie Wade (Kris Kristofferson), who disappeared back in 1957 – and his bones have just been found in the desert. Doing the detecting, meanwhile, is modern-day sheriff Sam Deeds (Chris Cooper), the son of the legendary lawman, Buddy (Matthew McConaughey), who first stood up to Wade and then stepped into his shoes when he disappeared.

'I said to Chris, "Every question you ask, it's not 'Where were you on the night of so-and-so, January '57?' It's, 'What kind of human being was my father?"'' says Sayles of *Lone Star*'s subtext. 'Sam only knew him this way. So it's, "You know stuff about him I don't know. I need to know that. For my heart as well as to solve the mystery."' As well as scrutinising race, identity, political corruption, myths, how the past informs the present and the intricate workings of a fully functioning community, *Lone Star* is a potent tale of fathers and sons.

Sayles explains why such stories often act as the meat of drama. 'It works in a personal way and a metaphoric way,' he says. 'People have a father or they don't have a father, and the absence of a father can be part of the story. Metaphorically, who's the person who hands down their world view to you? A lot of the point of the movie, of how the past isn't really gone, is that we don't start with a blank slate. The people around us give us the official story: this is how the world works. You can go with it or question it; accept or reject.'

Unfolding over 135 unhurried minutes, *Lone Star* is entirely riveting, a treat of sun-bleached widescreen lensing, rich characterisation, colourfully demotic dialogue, and flavoursome music spanning many genres to reflect the area's rich cultural mix. It's Sayles' biggest box-office hit ($12.5m from a $5m budget) and garnered rave reviews lauding how perfectly it caught the zeitgeist. Now, it's more relevant than ever.

'The scene where the concerned parents are arguing with the teacher over how Texas history is being taught, that could happen tomorrow,' says Sayles. 'It's going on now, in Texas. In Florida, there are African-American clerics who are saying, "Well, if they're going to lie about our history, and make it a law that you have to lie about our history in schools, part of Sunday School will be about what really happened with African Americans and white people in this state and in this country."'

As for the Tex-Mex border, in the 90s, unarmed patrol guards just sent those crossing illegally back with a 'goodbye and good luck', says Sayles. He shakes his head. 'There's a wall there now.'

LONE STAR IS OUT ON CRITERION COLLECTION 4K UHD AND BLU-RAY ON 26 FEBRUARY.

THE BIG SHOT

SPIDER-MAN'S UPSIDE-DOWN KISS

It's one of cinema's most iconic kisses, but the making of Spider-man's snog was far from romantic. Spidey (Tobey Maguire) and M.J. (Kirsten Dunst) lock lips during a deluge, him hanging from a fire escape above, her with feet planted firmly on the floor. As the heavens open, M.J. peels back the mask of the mystery man she doesn't realise is her school friend Peter Parker and exposes his mouth in order to seal their affection.

The press of her lips to his may have inflamed audiences watching Sam Raimi's 2002 hit *Spider-Man* but for Maguire it was akin to 'practically suffocating'. Harnessed upside down with the blood rushing to his head, his passionate scene was further complicated by overhead sprinklers sending driving rain down onto the sound stage and both actors. 'There was rain pouring down my nose,' he recalled of the scene, 'and then Kirsten pulls the mask up… and it's blocking the air passage there, so I couldn't breathe. And then she's kissing me, blocking the air passage there, so there's nowhere else to breathe. It was really tough, actually. They'd yell cut, and I would be [gasping for air], totally out of breath. It was torture. It makes you realise how important oxygen is.' Maguire endured by 'sneaking little breaths' out of the corner of his mouth during takes.

Raimi clearly felt it was worth the discomfort to nail a scene that has become more famous than the film in which it appears. To prep Dunst for the clinch, the director had given her a scrapbook of famous kisses before the night shoot on the Warner Bros. backlot (the alley is still there, next to the *ER* set, and can be seen as part of the studio backlot tour). 'I just wanted to let her know that this was a very special moment for the movie, and I wanted to communicate it in some way, that some moments can be remembered for a long, long time if they're done right,' Raimi said of the moment. 'I just wanted to gear her up, to let her know that she's going to be great in this, and that I wanted some of her Kirsten Dunst magic in that moment. And I think, once we had that meeting, she turned her head around to it and put on her performance magic, which Tobey did, too. They really made something special.'

Raimi's scrapbook worked for Dunst. 'That made me realise how romantic and special Sam wanted this to be,' she remembered in a recent interview. 'Even though it wasn't necessarily feeling that way with Tobey hanging upside down.' Despite the difficulty of achieving the moment, Dunst is as taken with the final product as any audience member. 'I'm proud to be a part of that. It looked like a great kiss,' she admitted. **JANE CROWTHER**

ALAMY

GOLDEN GRAHAMS

Editor-at-Large Jamie Graham unearths underrated classics...

THIS MONTH *Angst*

Pop quiz: can you name a movie that was an influence on the shock cinema of celebrated European filmmakers Gaspar Noé, Michael Haneke and Lars von Trier – not to mention a reference point for one of the most controversial American movies of the 80s, *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* – that few people have ever heard of? The answer is *Angst* (1983), the only film by Austrian writer/director Gerald Kargl.

Banned all over Europe at time of release, *Angst* is based on the crimes of real-life Austrian serial killer Werner Kniesek, who emerged from an eight-and-a-half-year prison sentence for shooting a 73-year-old woman, and immediately broke into a family home to torture and kill the three occupants. Basing a movie on such heinous crimes always raises questions of taste, decency and responsibility, but Kargl's film does not set out to thrill or titillate. It is a serious drama, a work of art, and few films so successfully burrow into the psychotic brain.

Largely devoid of dialogue but featuring a first-person narration that presents the history and violent reveries of a character credited as K., the Psychopath, *Angst* follows K. as he is released from prison, considers strangling a taxi driver with his shoelace but panics and flees the cab, then breaks into a secluded home to bind, torture and kill a mother and her adult son and daughter. He bundles the bodies into the trunk of his car ('The thought that I could have the corpses with me all the time excited me tremendously') and drives off, stopping to eat a sausage at a café, where he is arrested. And that's your lot.

What makes *Angst* astonishing, apart from Erwin Leder's skittish performance as the killer, is the way in which it is shot by Zbigniew Rybczynski. A cinematographer, director, animator and experimental artist, Rybczynski shoots much of the film from a few feet above K., at a 45-degree angle, with the camera seemingly levitating as K. runs through woodland or charges around the house. It even circles K. as he is on the move, and itself tilts and pirouettes as it floats magically through the air – effortless gymnastics that will likely put cinephiles in mind of Mikhail Kalatozov's celebrated documentary *I Am Cuba*, or Emmanuel Lubezki's lensing for Terrence Malick, or, yes, the darkly delirious films of Gaspar Noé, untethered and unhinged.

How was it done? For some shots, Rybczynski made a homemade SnorriCam (a camera rigged to an actor's body, like in Aronofsky's *Pi*) consisting of a metal hoop so the camera could rotate 360 degrees; in others, Rybczynski canted the camera with rods as it glided along wires. The entire movie was filmed without ever looking through a viewfinder to establish the frame, and was, almost inconceivably, shot in a mirror tilted down at a 45-degree angle. This was the only way to realise certain shots, but it cost too much to flip numerous scenes, so they shot the whole film like that and flipped the final positive.

Far from 'showing off', the experiential camerawork, like the narration (which was lifted from the psychological evaluations of Kniesek and those of another serial killer, Peter Kürten aka The Vampire of Düsseldorf), helps viewers to see inside the skull of a psychotic killer. It is, as it should be, a nauseating experience, but essential for those who can stomach it.

JAMIE WILL RETURN NEXT ISSUE...
FOR MORE RECOMMENDATIONS, FOLLOW @JAMIE_GRAHAM9 ON TWITTER/X

See this if you liked...

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE 1971
Another dangerous man talking directly to the audience, albeit with a good deal more glee.

HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER 1986
Loosely based on the murders of Henry Lucas, this flat, grubby masterpiece is the anti-*Silence of the Lambs*.

FUNNY GAMES 1997
Michael Haneke's deeply upsetting home-invasion film is hard to watch. 'So why do you want to?' it asks.

I STAND ALONE 1998
The brutal debut of Gaspar Noé owes much to *Angst*, as the Argentinian auteur admits on the US disc of Kargl's film.

ONE MORE...
SCHRAMM 1993
German serial killer film soaked in misery and paranoia. See also Fatih Akin's *The Golden Glove* (2019).

GERALD KARGL, JELINSKI & BUTTGEREIT

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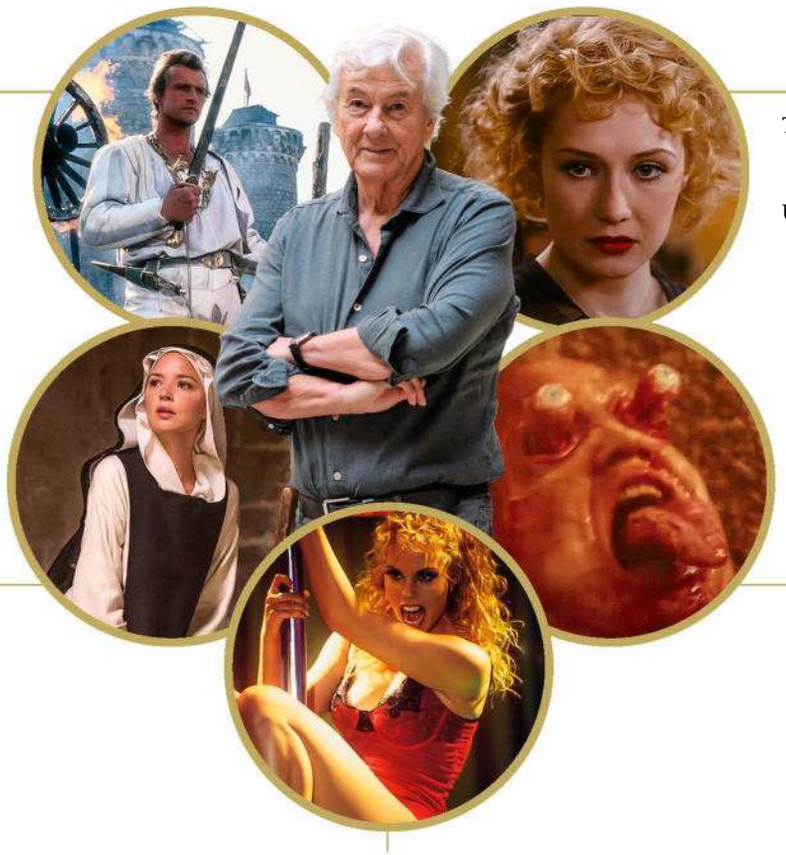
PAUL VERHOEVEN

Would you like to know more?



(RE)BORN IN THE USA

Born in 1938, Paul Verhoeven developed his interest in filmmaking during his time in the Dutch Navy, for whom he made documentaries. He made a series of feature films, many of them starring Rutger Hauer, before leaving his native Netherlands to helm his first English-language film, medieval epic *Flesh and Blood* (1985), again with Hauer. But Verhoeven's big Hollywood break came with his 'American Jesus' tale, 1987's *RoboCop*.

BASER INSTINCTS

From *Starship Troopers*' all-inclusive showers to *that* leg cross, Verhoeven has never been shy about matters of the flesh. The director likes to push boundaries – not only in *Basic Instinct*, but also in the voyeurism-centred *Hollow Man* (2000) and rape-revenge tale *Elle* (2016). 'Sex is the essence of existence,' he told *The Times*. 'Without it, there are no species any more.' Recent erotic drama *Benedetta* (2021) showed he has no intention of toeing the line any time soon…

SATIRE POWER

Verhoeven's 80s and 90s work offers a smart, satirical and sometimes scathing take on American culture. In *RoboCop*, *Total Recall* (1990) and *Starship Troopers* (1997), he finds plenty to say about the country's consumerist excess, rampant corruption and moral decline. Often dismissed as trash, 1995's *Showgirls* sends up vulgarity with its own pointed seediness, gleefully subverting the American dream.

MILITARY COUPS

The horrors of 30s/40s Europe had a profound impact on Verhoeven that filtered into his work. Unimpressed by the conservatism of *Starship Troopers*' source material, he adapted it into a wickedly sharp commentary on fetishistic militarism. He tackled the subject of war more earnestly in two World War Two dramas, the Golden Globe-nominated *Soldier of Orange* (1977) and *Black Book* (2006), which was shortlisted for a BAFTA.

VIOLENT TENDENCIES

'The world is full of violence,' the filmmaker told *The Guardian*. There's certainly plenty of it in Verhoeven's blockbusters, from Officer Murphy's still-harrowing takedown in *RoboCop* to the grotesque ballooning heads of *Total Recall*. Why the fascination with body horror? 'People love seeing violence and horrible things,' he explained to the *LA Times*. 'The human being is bad and can't stand more than five minutes of happiness.' **JOEL HARLEY**

KEY MOVIES

ROBOCOP 1987

★★★★★

Biting satire meets bruising action in Verhoeven's bleak, funny and ultimately humanistic vision of the near future.

BASIC INSTINCT 1992

★★★★½

The quintessential 90s erotic thriller remains Verhoeven's most controversial film – which is saying something.

STARSHIP TROOPERS 1997

★★★★★

Both a whooping, hollering war film and a slyly savage send-up of fascism and American exceptionalism.

ELLE 2016

★★★★★

Verhoeven's startling subversion of the rape-revenge template was a major awards success, including an Oscar nom for Isabelle Huppert.

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THE TF BRAIN

ROMCOMS

Could you be the one... to answer all 15 questions?

EASY

1 *The Tall Guy* marked the feature debut of which big-name British screenwriter?
2 What is the unappetising colour of Bridget Jones' potato leek soup?
3 Cher won the Best Actress Oscar for which movie?
4 Where is *Crazy Rich Asians* primarily set?
5 Comic Relief 2019 saw the cast of which film reunite for a 25th-anniversary short?

MEDIUM

1 Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan co-starred in three 90s romcoms... name them.
2 Who directed and co-wrote 2022's *Bros*?
3 *Candy Cane Lane*'s Reginald Hudlin previously directed Eddie Murphy in which romcom?
4 *Think Like a Man* is based on a book by which US TV star?
5 *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*' Kate Hudson and Matthew McConaughey reteamed for which 2008 movie?

HARD

1 In *Rye Lane*, which 90s hip-hop album is Yas looking to reclaim?
2 Name the 2013 sequel to 1999's *The Best Man*.
3 In which movie did Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy first share the screen?
4 'He's done keeping his story straight' is the tagline for which romcom?
5 Which of these romcoms *didn't* win Best Picture? a) *It Happened One Night* b) *The Apartment* c) *You Can't Take it With You* d) *Working Girl*

ANSWERS: **EASY** – 1. RICHARD CURTIS 2. BLUE 3. *MOONSTRUCK* 4. SINGAPORE 5. *FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL* **MEDIUM** – 1. *JOE VERSUS THE VOLCANO, SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE, YOU'VE GOT MAIL* 2. NICHOLAS STOLLER 3. *BOOMERANG* 4. STEVE HARVEY 5. *FOOL'S GOLD* **HARD** – 1. A TRIBE CALLED QUEST'S *THE LOW END THEORY* 2. *THE BEST MAN HOLIDAY* 3. *WOMAN OF THE YEAR* (1942) 4. *LOVE, SIMON* 5. D) *WORKING GIRL*

SEARCHLIGHT, WARNER, UNIVERSAL

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NAME THE FRAME

Can you guess these eight sandy scenes?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

ANSWERS: 1. KANDAHAR 2. APOCALYPSE NOW 3. MAD MAX: FURY ROAD 4. STARSHIP TROOPERS 5. THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE 6. STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE 7. BACK TO THE FUTURE PART III 8. TOTAL RECALL

Dialogue

Mail, rants, theories etc.

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★ STAR LETTER

On a recent visit to the Petrifying Well at Knaresborough, I noticed that among 15th-century soothsayer Old Mother Shipton's predictions was an apparent forecast of this year's Oscars. After all, she foretold that there would be a very large 'fire' (*Oppenheimer*), a virgin queen will reign successfully (*Barbie*) and there shall be a carriage without a horse (*Ferrari* will also win). Most surprisingly, she predicted that sea monsters shall rise from the deepest depth and the world will be saved by a trident-wielder, which can only mean that *Meg 2: The Trench* is going to pick up a few gongs.

JACK HARGREAVES, LEEDS

A brolly good show: Timothée Chalamet as Willy Wonka

Take that, Betfred. Sceptics may say otherwise, but just because no previous Best Picture winners have involved a giant octopus twatting a helicopter, it doesn't mean there can't be a first time. Jack and everyone with a letter printed here will receive a copy of *Femme*, available on 26 February on Blu-ray via Signature Entertainment. Didn't send an address? Email it! No deets, no disc!

TUNED IN

Those twitchy little snapperwhippers and phiz-whizzing snozzcumbers in Hollywood made mes a-thinking I was barking up the wrong dog. Seeing the trailer for Mr Wonka's movie, I was thinking it would be a delumptious chocolating fantasy. Me was going with the chiddlers to my local plexermult to see it, and right before my winkles and earwigs was a humplehammering musical!! I knows two rights don't equal a left but what a frobscottle of a sweety-toothed treat of a singalongo picture show.

THE BFG, VIA EMAIL

@vNorberto65
[on Godzilla teaming up with Kong] 'I find it a little pathetic that Godzilla needs help... Toho's Godzilla killed everyone by himself'

What an honour to hear from a veritable giant of cinema – and we're glad that you enjoyed (we think) *Wonka*. Though we would be intrigued to hear how anyone sitting behind your IMAX-like frame found the movie (literally)...

TUNED OUT

OK, who edited the soundtrack to *Top Gun: Maverick*? I rewatched the film on DVD because I thought it was great, particularly the montage accompanied by The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again*. It's a great choice and the build to the climax is excellent... but then they cut out Roger Daltrey's scream of release/celebration/exhilaration. What an anticlimax. I spent the rest of the film stunned, muttering, 'They cut the scream.' A truly stupid decision. The filmmakers should be tied to the back of an F/A-18 while the engines are switched on.

LEE, VIA EMAIL

Sounds harsh... how about push-ups till sundown instead? Maybe they were confident viewers would be so pumped by the scene, they'd bring their own scream, so binned Roger's. But it can frustrate when a favourite tune is chopped and changed, or frivolities like sound FX and dialogue get in the way. Pipe down, you wayward kids – we wanna hear Simple Minds!

HAPPY VIEW YEAR

On New Year's Day 2023, my friend and I saw *Peter von Kant* at the local Curzon. Afterwards, she said it'd be

WHAT YOU MISSED ON THE POD LAST MONTH

Exclusive chats with George Clooney, Jodie Comer, *Priscilla* star Cailee Spaeny, *Society of the Snow* director J.A. Bayona and *Night Swim*'s Kerry Condon and Wyatt Russell. Plus reviews and more, every week!

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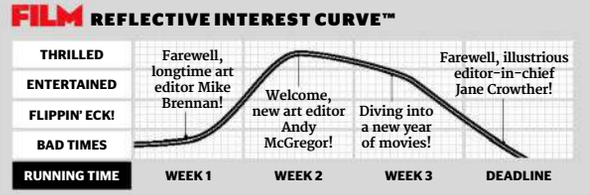
FILM REFLECTIVE INTEREST CURVE™



SIGNATURE. WARNER BROS. – 20TH CENTURY STUDIOS

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OFFICE SPACED

CHATTER 'GEMS' OVERHEARD IN THE *TOTAL FILM* OFFICE THIS MONTH...

*'If I feel sad, I just have a slice of Cruise cake'
***'Just had my soul saved at the petrol station'** *'I wonder how much Mandalorian there'll be in the Grogu movie?'

impossible for me to see 365 films at the cinema over the year... challenge accepted! Taking full advantage of my Odeon and Home passes, I went to five film festivals, an all-day Twilight Saga screening, showings in the middle of split shifts at work... despite my enthusiasm occasionally wavering, I completed the challenge with my love of cinema as strong at the end of the year as at the start. However, I did enjoy *Expend4bles* more than *Oppenheimer*. So there might be some lasting damage...
JAKE HUMPHRIES, VIA EMAIL

Phenomenal work, Jake – well done. But what will you do for an encore [looks slyly at calendar, noting 2024 is a leap year...]? And it's actually refreshing to hear you preferred our turkey of the year to our top choice [reaches under desk, jabs red button].

LOVING MEMORIES

Jamie Graham's *Intermission* column [issue 346] struck a chord with me. It got me thinking about how certain films make you think of lost loved ones. My best friend also died, about two years ago, and it still feels raw. Growing up, I'd go to his house, where his older brother had loads of 80s actioners on VHS. We'd sneak into his room to watch *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Commando* and *No Retreat, No Surrender*. My dad passed away 14 years ago and loved horror, especially B movies. The last present I bought him was *Sharknado* on DVD! In the hospital the night he died, the family bizarrely watched *Saw II*. Sad times, but some wonderful memories.
MATT BATES, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for sharing, Matt, and our sincere condolences. We hope that rewatching those movies brings you comfort. They say time heals all wounds... but there's also something to be said for Arnie creating new ones while running about in a grenade vest and camo paint.

DAY AFTER TOM-ORROW

In response to Tom [*Dialogue*, issue 345], I've come up with an idea for a festive sequel to *The Extomdables*. The Toms go up against the Chrises (Pine, Hemsworth, Evans, Walken, Waltz) in *The Extomdables 2: Chris Mass Panic*.
VICTORIA, DURHAM

Hard yes with sleigh bells on. We're not saying it would be better if *TF* readers ran Hollywood. But we're not *not* saying it, either...

AARON V JORDAN

[on the Marvel Netflix shows being canon]
'I've always pretended [the characters] were there in the big Endgame and we just didn't see them amid all the chaos!'

YOU CAN ALSO WRITE TO Total Film, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London, W2 6JR (postal addresses will be used for the sole purpose of sending out prizes)

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SPOILER ALERT!

60 SECOND SCREENPLAY

TF SAVES YOU THE COST OF A MOVIE EVERY MONTH. THIS ISSUE:
THE HUNGER GAMES: THE BALLAD OF SONGBIRDS & SNAKES... WORDS **MATT LOOKER**

FADE IN:

INT: ACADEMY, PANEM
TOM BLYTH, a grade-A student, is poor and hungry and determined to restore his family's fortune. So he pretends to be a rich jerk like his classmates.

PETER DINKLAGE
I am the creator of The Hunger Games, and this year's prize money will be awarded to the best mentor of the tributes. Tom, because I really don't like you, I'm assigning you the 'runt girl'.

TOM BLYTH
The one that's just attacked someone with a snake and then led the crowd in a rousing rendition of a protest song? Seems like a good choice, TBF!

EXT: ZOO ENCLOSURE
TOM BLYTH meets 'runt girl' RACHEL ZEGLER and they instantly form a bond, despite her and the other tributes being put on display for tourists to gawk at.

TOM BLYTH
I have stolen you some food, because you must have had so much hunger before these games.

RACHEL ZEGLER
Aww, that's nice. Maybe being forced to fight strangers to the death isn't so bad after all.

TOM BLYTH meets gamemaker VIOLA DAVIS to suggest ways to make the brutal murder event even more fun.

VIOLA DAVIS
Come look at my gigantic tub of rainbow snakes. They are extremely deadly unless they are familiar with your smell, in which case they are harmless.

TOM BLYTH
What an oddly specific and easy-to-exploit loophole...

INT: ARENA
RACHEL ZEGLER and TOM BLYTH become even closer. They very nearly kiss. Then he prepares her to battle to the death so that he can win some money.

TOM BLYTH
I'm not really supposed to do this, but take this rat poison in with you.

RACHEL ZEGLER
Great, that will help me fend off all the knives and axes.

The Hunger Games begin. All the unimportant characters immediately attack each other. RACHEL ZEGLER uses the rat poison but it accidentally kills one of the nice tributes.

RACHEL ZEGLER
Oh my goodness! Now I'm a killer! I totally wasn't expecting that in this brutal killing game.

VIOLA DAVIS unleashes her rainbow snakes, but TOM BLYTH first puts RACHEL ZEGLER's handkerchief in their container to save her. The snakes kill everyone else.

PETER DINKLAGE
Tom, we know that you've been cheating, which, of course, is morally wrong in our government-run death sport, so we're banishing you to be a policeman in the districts.

EXT: DISTRICT 12
TOM BLYTH bribes officials to be stationed at District 12, so he can be with RACHEL ZEGLER, who is now a successful country singer.

RACHEL ZEGLER
I want to be with you, even though we have diametrically opposed world views.

They live happily ever after for a few minutes before becoming embroiled in a rebel plot that sees TOM BLYTH kill a woman and then get his friend hanged. He hides his guns.

TOM BLYTH
We need to run away together. You can trust me. Probably.

EXT: WOODS
TOM BLYTH finds the guns again. For no reason, RACHEL ZEGLER reminds him that she is a loose end and quickly runs away. He hunts her down.

TOM BLYTH
Wow, who would have thought that a relationship based on murder, distrust and an insurmountable power imbalance would end badly?!?

Rather anticlimactically, he fails to find her, but then discovers that his banishment has been lifted so he returns to the Capitol.

VIOLA DAVIS
You passed all my tests. Now you will train with me.

TOM BLYTH
I see! So the real Hunger Games was the hunger and the games I experienced along the way!

INT: ACADEMY
TOM BLYTH receives the prize money and is now rich. He kills PETER DINKLAGE, just because.

AUDIENCE
OK, that's enough death now. We're full...

FIN

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LIONSGATE

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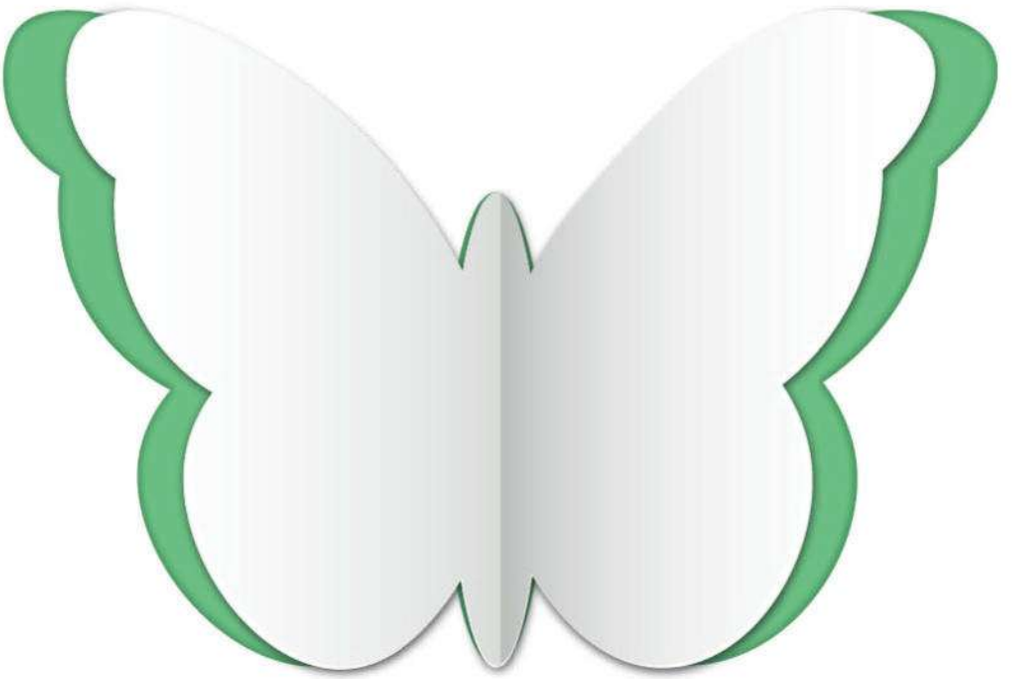

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